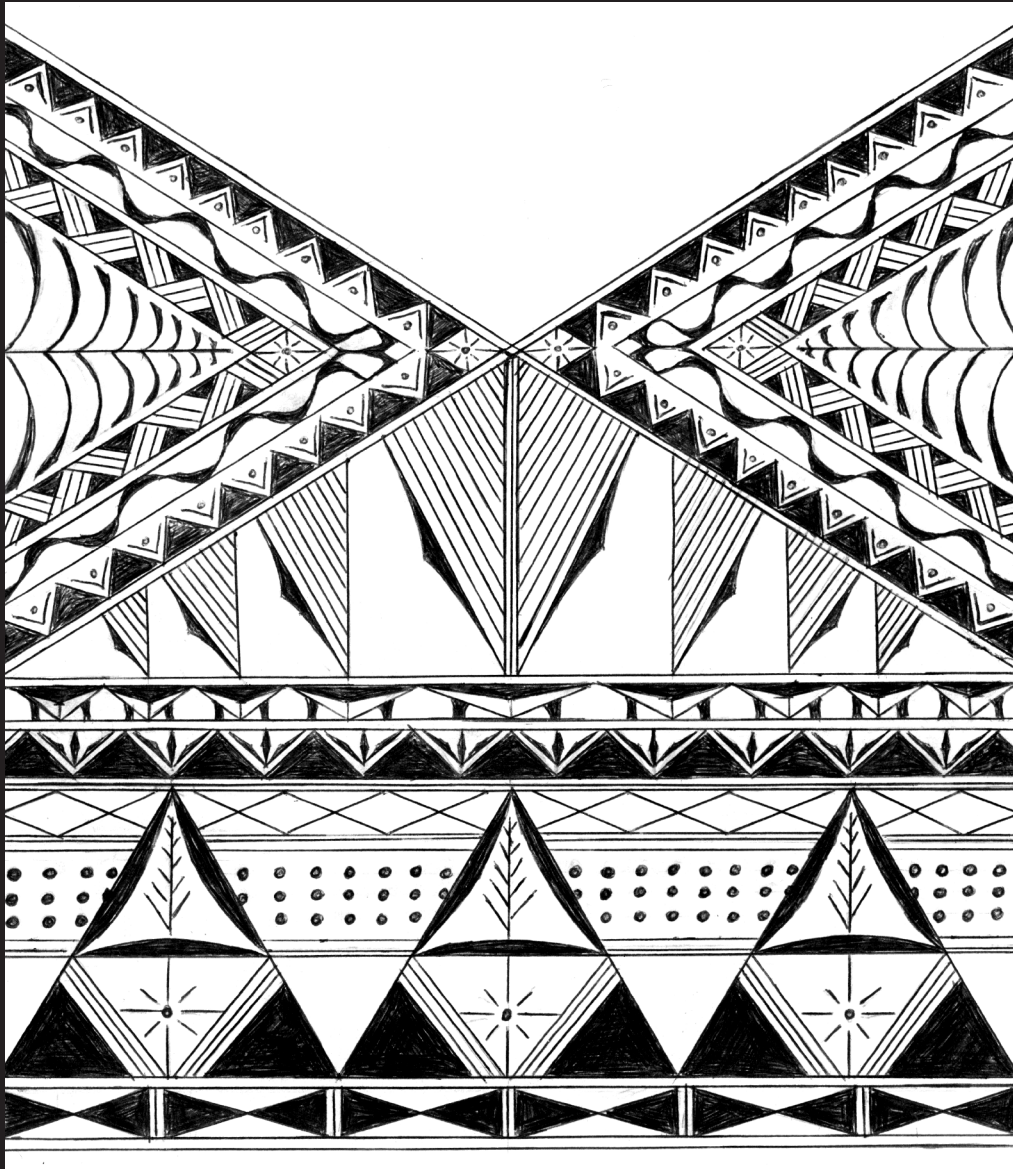


INDIGENOUS ENCOUNTERS  
Reflections on Relations between People in the Pacific

Edited by Katerina Martina Teaiwa



Center for Pacific Islands Studies Occasional Paper 43

**OCCASIONAL PAPERS OF  
THE CENTER FOR PACIFIC ISLANDS STUDIES**

The University of Hawai`i Center for Pacific Islands Studies publishes the Occasional Papers series. Along with the Pacific Islands Monograph Series (PIMS), it is supervised by the PIMS general editor and editorial board.

*Indigenous Encounters*  
**Project Advisory Board**

David Hanlon, General Editor  
Katerina Martina Teaiwa, Guest Editor  
Jan Rensel, Managing Editor  
Marata Tamaira, Graduate Assistant  
Leilani Basham  
Tarcisius Tara Kabutaulaka  
Lahela Perry  
Ty Kāwika Tengan  
Reina Whaitiri, Poetry review

A list of previous titles in the Occasional Papers series (formerly known as the Working Papers), including seminar papers, conference proceedings, and topical studies, appears at the back of this work. Copies of Occasional Papers are available at a nominal fee. Contact:

Occasional Papers Series  
Center for Pacific Islands Studies  
University of Hawai`i at Mānoa  
1890 East-West Road, Moore 215  
Honolulu, Hawai`i 96822-1890

telephone (808) 956-7700  
fax (808) 956-7053  
e-mail [cpis@hawaii.edu](mailto:cpis@hawaii.edu)

**OCCASIONAL PAPERS OF  
THE CENTER FOR PACIFIC ISLANDS STUDIES**

The University of Hawai`i Center for Pacific Islands Studies publishes the Occasional Papers series. Along with the Pacific Islands Monograph Series (PIMS), it is supervised by the PIMS general editor and editorial board.

*Indigenous Encounters*  
**Project Advisory Board**

David Hanlon, General Editor  
Katerina Martina Teaiwa, Guest Editor  
Jan Rensel, Managing Editor  
Marata Tamaira, Graduate Assistant  
Leilani Basham  
Tarcisius Tara Kabutaulaka  
Lahela Perry  
Ty Kāwika Tengan  
Reina Whaitiri, Poetry review

A list of previous titles in the Occasional Papers series (formerly known as the Working Papers), including seminar papers, conference proceedings, and topical studies, appears at the back of this work. Copies of Occasional Papers are available at a nominal fee. Contact:

Occasional Papers Series  
Center for Pacific Islands Studies  
University of Hawai`i at Mānoa  
1890 East-West Road, Moore 215  
Honolulu, Hawai`i 96822-1890

telephone (808) 956-7700  
fax (808) 956-7053  
e-mail [cpis@hawaii.edu](mailto:cpis@hawaii.edu)

**INDIGENOUS ENCOUNTERS**  
**Reflections on Relations between People in the Pacific**

*Edited by Katerina Martina Teaiwa*

Occasional Paper 43

**Center for Pacific Islands Studies**  
School of Hawaiian, Asian & Pacific Studies  
University of Hawai'i at Mānoa  
Honolulu

© 2007 by the authors

ISSN 0897-8905

Cover art and section motifs: *Aga`i Fenua* by Vaimu`a Muliava

Design and layout: Katerina Martina Teaiwa



Cartography: Manoa Mapworks, Inc., Honolulu, Hawai`i

## Contents

|   |     |
|---|-----|
| <i>Indigenous Encounters: Reflections on Relations<br/>between People in the Pacific</i><br>Katerina Martina Teaiwa                   | 1   |
| <i>Aga`i Fenua</i><br>Vaimu`a Muliava   | 11  |
| MAP: THE PACIFIC ISLANDS  | 20  |
| LEARNING THE PACIFIC  |     |
| <i>Ka Huaka`i<br/>Tehura</i><br>Brandy Nālani McDougall   | 23  |
| <i>Confessions of a Former History Teacher<br/>Iien Ippān Doon: This Time Together</i><br>Monica LaBriola                             | 28  |
| <i>Other Peoples' Flowers: Some Personal Reflections<br/>on Researching as an Outsider</i><br>Christopher Robbins                     | 51  |
| OCEANS AND ISLANDS  |     |
| <i>From Islands to Atoll: Relating Reefs of History<br/>at Kwajalein</i><br>Greg Dvorak   | 63  |
| <i>Between The Hui and Da Hui Inc.: Incorporating<br/>N-oceans of Native Hawaiian Resistance in Oceanic Studies</i><br>Kali Fermantez | 85  |
| BETWEEN SISTERS   |     |
| <i>Hangin' with the Sistas in Melsisi</i><br>Sara Lightner  | 103 |
| <i>Salt Water<br/>After the Swim<br/>Letter to Julia</i><br>Yola Gray   | 108 |

|   |     |
|---|-----|
| <i>Dearest Yola</i><br>Julia Gray   | 112 |
| POST-COLONIAL REFLECTIONS?  |     |
| <i>Chain Reaction</i><br><i>Manoa's Leisure</i><br><i>Honolulu Evening</i><br><i>Ice Age</i><br><i>Blind Truth</i><br><i>Sad Story</i><br><i>Birthday</i><br>B. David Kombako | 115 |
| <i>Mwahiei</i><br><i>Wini en Pohnpei</i><br>Emelihter Kihleng   | 122 |
| INSTITUTIONAL RELATIONS   |     |
| <i>Negotiating an Oceanic Space at the University<br/> of Hawai'i at Mānoa</i><br>Lu'ukia Archer, Malia Ka'aihue, U'i Keli'ikuli  | 129 |
| <i>Revisiting the "Pasifika Way" in a New School<br/> of Pasifika Education</i><br>Tanya Wendt Samu   | 137 |
| EMBODIED ENCOUNTERS   |     |
| <i>An Oceanic Nation</i><br>Karin Ingersoll   | 153 |
| <i>Some Place in My Body</i><br>Trisha Kehaulani Watson   | 158 |
| <i>Breaking Skin</i><br>Terri Janke   | 163 |
| PREVIOUS TITLES IN THE CPIS OCCASIONAL PAPERS SERIES  | 169 |

## *Indigenous Encounters*

### *Reflections on Relations between People in the Pacific*

Katerina Martina Teaiwa

*He aha te mea nui?*

What is the most important thing?

*He tāngata. He tāngata. He  
tāngata.*

It is people. It is people. It is people.

*Māori Proverb*

You cannot buy with money what can be gained by caring for people, especially your neighbors, says Delgadina Perez Hiton. Having lived for seven decades, Tan Del insists that relationships among people are the only enduring thing a person can count on.

Laura M. Torres Souder, *Daughters of the Island*

#### RELATIONSHIPS

A few years ago my father told me of an experience he had on Rabi Island in the northern part of Fiji. He said he was walking through Nuku town past the police station when a man stopped him and introduced himself. When the man said his name my father instantly knew who he was, though they had never met. The man asked him for thirty dollars. My father gave it to him immediately, with no questions about what he needed it for, or why he should give him the money. Later he explained to me that in the 1940s his mother, who was on her home island of Tabiteuea in Kiribati, had been struggling and needed money to help her family get to Banaba to see my grandfather. She went to a man in her village and asked for some help. Without question he gave her a hundred dollars he'd saved. The man at Nuku on Rabi, fifty years later and over a thousand miles from Tabiteuea, was his grandson.



In researching Banaban history these last ten years or so, I have been struck by just how much an active discourse of “difference” still exists between Banabans and I-Kiribati, in spite of interdependent relations on the ground.<sup>1</sup> Our home islands are part of one nation, and our people almost always related by genealogy. We share ideas, we share dances, we share kinship, and we share a problematic colonial history. However, the displacement of Banabans from their home island in Kiribati to Fiji in 1945 because of British, Australian, and New Zealand phosphate mining has transformed peoples’ perceptions of belonging and cultural identity.

Despite growing up in “multicultural Fiji,” fully aware of the politically tense Indo-Fijian and Fijian relations, I did not actively think about those between or within the other diverse groups who all call Fiji home. These include Rotumans, I-Kiribati, Banabans, Samoans, Tongans, Cook Islanders, New Zealanders, Australians, Chinese, descendents of Melanesian laborers, and people of mixed heritage. After the first coup in 1987, like many Indo-Fijians, some of our Banaban elders thought that perhaps they too were unwelcome in Fiji. We went from being on the indigenous electoral roll to being in a category called “Others,” drastically altering our relationship to the national politic and to our Fijian neighbors on Taveuni and Vanua Levu. An awareness of intense conflicts over identity and power among peoples so closely related, or who have lived together as communities for decades, pushed me to think more about strategic identifications and intra-Pacific relations. Reflecting on how I felt on 19 May 2000, standing in the middle of Suva as people ran in panic in response to the third Fiji coup, I became concerned about my lack of conceptual tools for understanding relations *between* Islanders.

As a student in Pacific Islands studies in the mid 1990s I found the decolonization framework promoted by Pacific scholars, writers, and activists very attractive and cathartic. It provided an outlet for all the hang-ups I’d had about being a minority in Fiji, and in the United States where I attended university. However, after teaching Pacific Islands studies for almost four years at the University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa (UHM) and reading my own students’ reflections, I now realize that the language I had learned in order to understand the dynamics of interethnic, intercultural, and interregional relations was limited. While women’s studies, post-colonial studies, and cultural studies offered multiple tools to think about differences of race, class, gender, sexuality, and sometimes

religion, they rarely engaged with discourses of indigeneity, often written off as essentialist constructions of culture. Thus, the “place-based” and spiritual dimensions of human relations are sometimes ignored in the very scholarly fields that critically engage power relations. I also found that the concept of kinship, so thoroughly researched in anthropology, and indeed focused on indigenous relations and place, did not always account for those in the contemporary and urban Pacific between Islanders of different cultures or classes.

Growing up in Fiji as a person of mixed Banaban, I-Kiribati, and African American heritage, experiencing the coups in 1987 and 2000, and now teaching Pacific studies, I find it hard not to be hyperconscious of ethnic and cultural differences and the ways in which history, power, religion, and economics shape the contemporary Pacific. When I visited Suva in 2005 and attended the annual concert of my alma mater, St. Joseph’s Secondary School, I was moved to see the girls on stage actively trying to address ethnic tensions through their theater, music, and dance.<sup>2</sup> Such activities remind me that we need to pay attention to the diverse and creative ways in which people on the ground deal with intercultural relations.

## ENCOUNTERS

In *Indigenous Encounters* I wanted to move away from broad generalizations about a common Pacific region or identity, racial binaries, and assumptions that all Fijians, Banabans, or Tongans think and act alike—and look more closely at the relations between people in everyday contexts. As teachers, researchers, students, and Islanders who live in this ocean, we are often caught up in the politics of daily life, where difference is negotiated, and practices and ideas are shared but rarely theorized. Articulating either the tensions or productive exchanges in our home islands is sometimes more challenging in Pacific Islands studies when our intellectual frameworks on race and culture are polarizing, or more reflective of a continental experience.

The relations represented by many of the pieces in *Indigenous Encounters* are not those between colonizers and natives, although those concepts are often real and necessary. It is the assumption of unequal power relations along old colonial lines in the contemporary Pacific that sometimes leads to an assumption of western superiority and

indigenous victimization. This ignores indigenous agency as well as the ways in which life in the Pacific is shaped by other factors—such as national and regional political and economic agendas, and particularly the security agenda, as well as religion, gender, education, class, and opportunity. Many of our problems today have less to do with “black and white” issues and more to do with relations between migrants and locals, between classes or gendered groups, and within indigenous communities. It is often likely that we engage such tensions more in comedy than in scholarship.<sup>3</sup> As struggles for political representation and economic survival become more intense, the complex protocols that our ancestors once employed for dealing with difference and connection between and across families, tribes, clans, valleys, rivers, and islands are increasingly relegated to the past or to the realm of the symbolic.

There is such an immense diversity of languages, cultures, and historical experiences in the Pacific that it is sometimes hard to justify a regional identity. While the terms *Melanesia*, *Micronesia*, and *Polynesia* have been productively embraced by many, and nation-based identifications are widely accepted, these divisions often enhance the gap between Islanders. Yet the Pacific has still-traceable genealogical ties that extend across cultural boundaries and connect us all. There are also contemporary alliances, formed particularly between Islanders in urban or diasporic contexts. We gesture to these past and present connections in regional political, performance, educational, and sports gatherings. However, true regional dialogue over economic and political options is fraught by continuing struggles with traditional and western forms of government and models of development, and with the push to make liberal democracy work in our particular cultural and economic contexts. In the meantime, our island environments and resources become subject to exploitation, global climate change, and other forces, and the Pacific Islands continue to function as a space for Australia, New Zealand, France, and the United States to apply their security priorities regardless of our needs.

Many of the answers we seek for conceptual and practical tools to deal with intra-Pacific relations, and options for regional survival, are to be found in indigenous philosophies and practices themselves. To see these possibilities often requires new forms of literacy for reading the performance or visual forms in which they lie. This is well illustrated by Vaimu’a Muliava’s contribution to the collection. His tattoo/tatau art and

the explanation accompanying it indicate how tradition may be lived and reconstructed in the present without losing a sense of continuity with the past and with an awareness of the politics of culture. His design is elaborated and articulated across a system that spans several islands and cultural and national groupings—`Uvea, Futuna, Tahiti, Fiji, Tonga, Sāmoa, Rotuma, New Caledonia, and French Polynesia.

Muliava explains his art in a way that is rare, but as conservator, scholar, artist, and traveling Uvean, he is able to draw on his multiple literacies combining research, oral traditions, and a knowledge of practice in the lived environment. In his tattoo he thus constructs a living pattern that encounters, connects, and relates elements of the past, present, and future, between multiple islands, political and cultural systems, peoples, practices, plants, and animals. He then grounds these in the meaning of actions, words, and symbols. His pattern, translated as “The shark eats the ocean and spreads his culture over the land,” eats through the pages and spreads its mark across the entire *Indigenous Encounters* collection.

## CONTRIBUTORS

The authors in this collection delve more deeply into encounters within and between groups or individuals on the ground, reflecting on specific events, places, observations, and experiences. Most are graduate students who are publishing for the first time. The goal of the project was to encourage upcoming scholars to think about the theme, publish their ideas, and consider continuing their work in Pacific studies. It is important that we nurture a critical mass of younger writers, artists, and scholars in and of the region, and I hope this publication contributes to that process. Few limitations were set on the genre of submissions. The University of Hawai`i's Center for Pacific Islands Studies encourages students to explore their research in both creative and conventional styles, recognizing that for centuries in the Pacific, knowledge was shared and archived in oral, visual, material, and embodied forms. As a result students have started to produce master's projects in both written and multimedia formats.

This collection is divided into six themes, reflecting the concerns of the authors. In “Learning Oceania,” we begin with Brandy Nālani McDougall's poetry on the voyages of the ancestors, the birth of a people from the sea, and, much later, the attempts of the

famous artist Paul Gauguin to capture the mystery of this history in a woman who is watched over by the dead and living. Monica LaBriola explores the lived meaning of genealogy and family connections in her narrative, followed by a critical reflection on learning and becoming part of the Marshall Islands community in the North Pacific. Christopher Robbins's experience is similar, albeit in an institutional context in the South Pacific. Both he and Monica come in as teachers from the United States and in the process become students of the Pacific.

In "Oceans and Islands," Greg Dvorak and Kali Fermantez engage the ocean as both metaphor and fluid substance for connecting Marshallese, Japanese, Americans, and Hawaiians to global communities. Greg situates his scholarship both in broader historical and imperial contexts and in the material reef and coral that make up the Marshallese archipelago. He then reflects on the ways in which multiple and diverse individuals and communities call Kwajalein "home." Kali weaves critical theory and Pacific cultural studies in his analysis of a Hawaiian surf company called Da Hui Inc., situating its history in the contexts of both local surfing relations on the North Shore and global surfing business interests.

There is poignant comic relief in "Between Sisters," as we follow the journey of Sara Lightner in her first encounters with the Catholic nuns on the island of Pentecost in Vanuatu. Her piece is followed by the writing of two artistic siblings of Papua New Guinean and Australian descent, Yola and Julia Gray, both frank but loving in their delivery, sparring over their elder and younger "sisterness." The works by these three authors give us a vivid image of the everyday exchanges of women in the Pacific.

The poems by Emelihter Kihleng and B. David Kombako in "Post-Colonial Reflections?" illustrate some of the more disconcerting aspects of Pacific life in the diaspora and urban centers of Oceania. Here, class, identity, and consumption practices reflect the disconnection and displacement Islanders experience in the post-colonial American context. New consumption practices and iconic symbols are particularly highlighted. There is a question mark in the section title and a hyphen in the first word because it is debatable as to whether there is anything "post" colonial about this situation.

"Institutional Relations" engages the ways in which Islanders attempt to negotiate identity and come together within an academic setting. Contrary to the ways in which

categories such as *Pacific*, *Oceania*, and *Pasifika* appear to gather everyone under a regional umbrella, the reality in the university is less than organic, and alliance building and resource sharing have to be actively nurtured and supported. Tanya Wendt Samu, and coauthors Lu`ukia Archer, Malia Ka`aihue, and U`i Keli`ikuli give us some insight into these issues at the University of Auckland and the University of Hawai`i at Mānoa, respectively. Samu in particular encourages us to think about regional terms such as *Pacific Islander* and *Pasifika* that appear to unify diverse groups. She also outlines various practices in the educational context that are recognized and accepted as “Pasifika.”

We end with “Embodied Encounters,” in which Pacific peoples literally “feel” the process of engagement and negotiation, of both the empowering and violent variety, in their bodies. Karen Ingersoll reimagines the violence in the body of the viti bird, which signifies a larger struggle between her protagonist and the process of cultural and political change within her community. Trisha Kehaulani Watson finds growth, personal empowerment, and memory in her encounters with Māori in Aotearoa. Name-calling is probably one of the most potent ways by which people negatively engage those of another culture or ethnicity, and Terri Janke eloquently grounds us in this disturbing but common childhood experience. I thank Ms. Janke, already a well-published and celebrated indigenous Australian author, for sharing this story with us.

#### ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The idea for this collection was inspired by the poetry of Ruperake Petaia and the writing and teaching of Teresia Kieuea Teaiwa, Epeli Hau`ofa, Albert Wendt, Terence Wesley-Smith, David Hanlon, Greg Denning, and Margaret Jolly. Conversations with and support from Noenoe Silva, Ty Kāwika Tengan, Hokulani Aikau, Vilsoni Hereniko, Kali Fermantez, Greg Dvorak, and Lahela Perry were invaluable for the process.

When I was a doctoral student at the Australian National University (ANU) a few years ago, the support and creativity of fellow students Greg Rawlings, Zoe Pearson, Maria Bargh, Jo Diamond, Selai Korovusere, Mereseini Mainaqaqelelevu, and Tarcisius Kabutaulaka helped me to dialogue across national, cultural, and disciplinary boundaries. I would also like to remember the late Minoru Hokari, who passed away too soon, and

who once e-mailed me a chapter of his PhD thesis while we were both studying at ANU. His work on the body, history, and cross-cultural relations in Australia very much inspires me and my students.

Many thanks to Leilani Basham for being part of the discussion process for this collection, and *kia ora tāua* to Reina Whaitiri for feedback on the poetry. A special thanks to Lahela for suggesting Vaimu`a Muliava's work, and to Vai for generously sticking with us as he moved between Hawai`i, France, and Australia. Mahalo nui loa to Marata Tamaira for her excellent editorial assistance, to Coco Needham for much administrative support and aloha, to Brooke Nevitt for helping get things underway, and to Jane Eckelman for the Pacific Islands map. Much gratitude to David Hanlon, director of the Center for Pacific Islands Studies and editor of this Occasional Papers series, for saying "yes" to the numerous things I nagged him for. Above all, I am grateful for the opportunity to work with the meticulous and generous Jan Rensel, managing editor for the UHM Center for Pacific Islands Studies.

*Indigenous Encounters* was largely completed while I was a research scholar at the Macmillan Brown Centre for Pacific Studies at the University of Canterbury in New Zealand. I am most grateful for this scholarship and the support of the Macmillan Brown Centre staff. I especially want to acknowledge my fellow Macmillan Brown scholar, Keith Camacho, and his partner Juliann Anesi, who are some of the most generous people I know. Keith was writing about very similar intracultural issues in the Chamorro context while this was being completed and Delgadina Perez Hiton, mentioned in the second epigraph to this introduction, is his grand-aunt. Keith and I were MA students in the same Pacific Islands studies cohort at the University of Hawai`i at Mānoa in the mid-1990s, and what we learned there still influences our work.

Kam bati n raba and vinaka vaka levu to the contributors for responding to the call for submissions and generously sharing their writing. I hope that all of them, and especially the first-time authors, continue their critical and compassionate engagement with life in the Pacific.

KATERINA MARTINA TEAIWA, who was an assistant professor in Pacific Islands studies at the University of Hawai`i at Mānoa from 2002 till 2006, is now Pacific studies convener

at the Australian National University. In 2006 she was a Macmillan Brown Research Scholar at the University of Canterbury in Christchurch, New Zealand. Her research and teaching interests are in the history of phosphate mining in the Pacific, popular culture and consumption in Oceania, Pacific dance studies, visual ethnography, and theory and method for Pacific studies. She is currently working on a book manuscript, "Between Our Islands: A Multi-sited Ethnography of Banaban Phosphate." She also developed the "Culture Moves" Pacific dance studies resource Web site at [www.hawaii.edu/cpis/dance](http://www.hawaii.edu/cpis/dance) based on the successful "Culture Moves! Dance in Oceania from hiva to hip hop" event held in 2005 at the Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa in Wellington.

### Notes

1. The island of Banaba or Ocean Island is now a part of the Republic of Kiribati (formerly the Gilbert Islands) in the Central Pacific. There are both cultural differences and strong connections between the peoples of these islands. However, Banabans and I-Kiribati are still divided over the history of phosphate mining administered by the British, Australian, and New Zealand governments between 1900 and 1980. Taxing of the industry allowed for income to be used for the Gilbert and Ellice Islands Colony (GEIC). Local GEIC and especially Gilbert Island leaders defended this right aggressively, while Banabans saw this as unfair since it was their island being mined. Thus, earlier cultural connections between the islands in the Gilberts and Banaba started to break down, especially after the Banabans were removed to Fiji in 1945. Banabans then began an independence movement against the Gilbert and Ellice Islands Colony and constructed a new culture and identity on Rabi Island in direct opposition to their Kiribati relatives. The independence movement was not successful but intermarriage and other exchanges continue today while the feud on identity remains.
2. The 1987 and 2000 coups in Fiji are usually attributed to tensions between Fijians and Indo-Fijians and to struggles over political power and land, rather than to problems within each of those communities. The multitude of other cultures and economic agendas that surround these two main groups are rarely factored into the discourse or scholarly analyses. It was apparent on stage at the St. Joseph's concert that the girls, while incredibly creative and positive in their approach, had only the polarizing Fijian/Indo-Fijian framework to address racial tensions in Fiji. St. Joseph's is an all-girl Catholic secondary school in Suva.
3. See, for example, the critical and hilarious work of the New Zealand-based Laughing Samoans, the Naked Samoans, the animated television series *bro'Town*, and in Hawai'i, comedians Frank De Lima, and Da Braddahs & Friends.

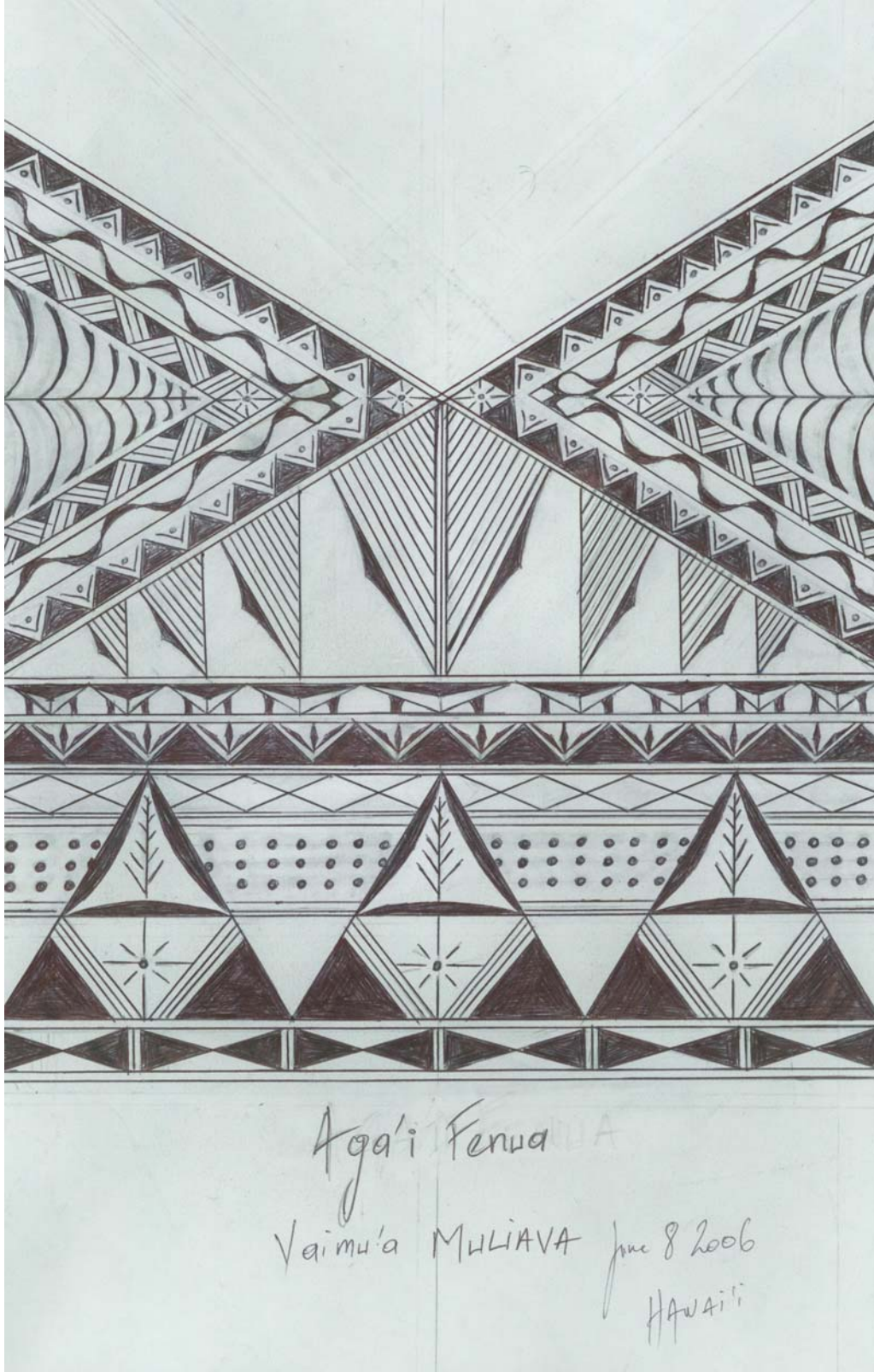
### Reference

Souder, Laura M.

- 1992 *Daughters of the Island: Contemporary Chamorro Women Organizers on Guam*. Second edition. Lanham, MD: University Press of America.



*In memory of our greatest king, Lavelua Tomasi Kulimoetoke  
He Alikī Hau To'a ne'e Atamai Masila pea mo Fakakaukau Gaholo*



## *Aga`i Fenua*

Vaimu`a Muliava

There are three kingdoms in `Uvea mo Futuna, one in `Uvea and two in Futuna. These Polynesian kingdoms are now incorporated into the French Republic. Queen Amelia Tokagahahau Aliki Lavelua, acting in the name of the three kingdoms, signed a protectorate treaty with France, which was ratified in 1887. `Uvea mo Futuna was used by the United States as a military base during the Second World War. Under the leadership of Tomasi Kulimoetoke, who was elected king in 1959, `Uvea mo Futuna chose by referendum to become a French overseas territory, effective 1967. Because these kingdoms are small, with few natural resources, economic development is a challenge. Consequently, only about 10 percent of the population have regular jobs, and most people work for the government, the local television station, public offices, and schools. Many live in a traditional fashion, planting yams and taro, fishing, and working in the local arts.

This tattoo design is dedicated to our *aga`i fenua*, the traditional `Uvea mo Futuna political system, without which our identity as Uveans and Futunans would have disappeared a long time ago. Similarly, Uvean and Futunan people living on the islands who don't have regular paid work would not have survived in this "modern" world without their cultural foundation. Throughout this dedication, I pay tribute to our king, Lavelua Tomasi Kulimoetoke (1918–2007), who passed away on 7 May 2007 after a forty-eight year reign full of wisdom and dedication to his people; and to the two kings of Futuna, Tu`i Sigave and Tu`i Agaifo, the sacred keepers and living symbols on earth of our *aga`i fenua*.

### THE DESIGN CONCEPT

In this design I wanted to personify and materialize a more fluid understanding of the term *aga`i fenua* or "tradition." From that perspective, I decided to take inspiration from the different linguistic patterns observed between Polynesian languages and, as a free

artist, to push the limits of the Uvean language currently circumscribed by linguistic science.

According to linguists, there are two ways of translating a native term. The first one corresponds to the literal meaning. The second one corresponds to the proper meaning or how the term is used.

*aga`i fenua*

- first meaning: the manner of or in land

*aga* = manner or soul

*fenua* = land

- second meaning: the soul of the land

Linguists mark the difference between the term *aga* (soul or manner) and the term *`aga*, which means shark.<sup>1</sup> According to them, the difference resides in the initial glottal stop (‘), which differentiates the pronunciation of the word.

Ed Burrows, during his journey in `Uvea, noticed that the glottal stop could be a litigious point in the study of the native language. For example, with the term *malae* or *marae*, Uveans insert a glottal stop and say *mala`e*. “It is even possible that the stop may have been inserted in *malae* between the time Bataillon wrote it in his dictionary and the time I heard it.”<sup>2</sup> He added, “Sometimes I suspected that informants speaking to me in Uvean inserted glottal stops because they were speaking slowly and clearly for my benefit” (Burrows 1937, 17). I noticed that myself, when I heard my grandparents telling stories. The employment of the glottal stop is not systematic; some Uveans say *aga`i fenua*, while others say *agai fenua*.

This is the danger of linguistic science: while it certainly helps to conserve a native language, at the same time it coagulates it, killing certain internal linguistic variants. For example, in the standard written Hawaiian language there is no longer a “t,” whereas before transcription, the use of the “t” sound was common.

Standardizing language is often linked to nation-making and the marking of cultural specificities and differences. This can lead to ignorance of the common cultural traits one people share with another. Many Uveans and Futunans, for example, have

connections with Tonga, Ha`amoa (Sāmoa), Tokelau, Lotuma (Rotuma), Fisi (Fiji), and Niue, and it is likely that pre- and post-European connections made the Uvean language into the form in which it is transmitted today. But linguistic standardization may hide pre-European links between `Uvea and other islands.

I do understand that linguistic observations are based on a rigorous study of the way Uveans practice their language. But, with all the due respect I have for all my elders who informed and still inform the science and for the work done by all the linguists, I believe the glottal stop is not a generality, and while it may be assigned, it should not be considered as a determining factor for understanding. What makes the meaning of a term is not the presence or absence of a glottal stop but the way the term is used in a sentence.

Anyway, as an artist free of any kind of circumscription, scientific or “traditional” (as defined today), I have decided that *aga`i fenua* could have a:

- first meaning: the shark in the land
- second meaning: the soul of the land

From this perspective, I found that the character that best personifies tradition is the shark. In `Uvea, the king is the living symbol of the tradition, so in reference to the title *Tu`i*, which designates the representative of the gods on earth, I made the parallel between the *aga`i fenua* and the title *Tu`i* (*Tu`i`Uvea*, *Tu`i Agaifo*, *Tu`i Sigave*, *Tu`i Manu`a*, and the most reputed, *Tu`i Tonga*).

*Tu`i`Uvea*

- First meaning: to stand in `Uvea
- Second meaning: the representative of the gods on earth; the ruler of `Uvea

I did not use here the *faka`uvea* translation of the term *tu*, “to shake,” but the *faga ouvea* one, “to stand.” This is from one of the two languages, the Iai and the Faga Ouvea, practiced on the Loyalty Island of `Uvea Lalo (written Ouvea Lalo) in New Caledonia. During pre-European history, Uvean people led by the Aliko Kaukelo migrated to this Melanesian island and called it `Uvea Lalo in reference to their island home.

In the way the Hawaiian ancestors personified the god Kū in their artwork, I wanted my design invoking the Tu`i titles to be a coherent personification of the *aga`i fenua* by using the literal meaning of the native term to guide my concept. In Hawai`i, Kū (or Tū) is known among other things as a war god. All the wooden images of Tū represent a man standing proudly and firmly anchored in the ground. The arms are condensed, close to the body and directed toward the ground. The impression that emanates from these wooden images is a feeling of strength and tension applied by the body on the ground.

#### THE ELABORATION OF THE DESIGN

Following my understanding of the term *aga`i fenua* as “the shark-in-the-land,” the first step was to define a frame that illustrates a shark. So I decided to draw a monster with two eyes and a mouth. The second step was to fill the frame and to cut the space in a decorative band. The last step was to fill the decorative band with all the elements of the tradition that have allowed the expansion of Polynesian culture and the survival of our traditional political system.

##### *The Shark Is the Frame*

In my way of thinking, the shark is the ruler of tradition in the way that Tū is the ruler of the land. Consequently, when the Tu`i Tonga in the old time wanted to extend his empire, the *aga`i fenua* wanted to spread and to extend its political system over all the islands of the Pacific. To this effect, patterns related to navigation had to be present in the design. A feeling of conquest, then, must emanate from the design. The position of the patterns had to translate the following sentence: “The shark eats the ocean and spreads his culture over the land.” The triangular spaces on each side symbolize the eyes, and the mouth is symbolized here by the teeth.

##### *The Patterns*

- The elements of navigation and the elements necessary to the functioning of the *aga`i fenua*

The wind, the stars, and the sun are figured on the upper part of the head of the *aga*, whereas the nautical currents are figured on the lower part.

- The eyes

The first decorative band presents triangles and one point above a V figure pattern. In my scheme, triangles symbolize islands, the points, the stars indicating the position of the island, and the V, the figure of the bird leading the navigator throughout the coral fencing of the island. The second band starts with two birds on each side symbolizing the *gogo* (frigate bird) and the *katafa* (albatross), leading birds of the open sea. The third band presents a *lau fala* (pandanus leaf) pattern symbolizing a sail.

At the junction point of these decorative bands is figured an astral pattern that represents the sun and the moon. The triangular space on each side presents a Tongan *kupesi* (stencil) pattern. I cut the pattern in the middle and joined the two fragments by their extremities to figure the pupil of the eyes. In my scheme, this *kupesi* pattern symbolizes the nautical winds. The meaning is inspired by the Tongan *kupesi* pattern called Tokelaufeletoa. This pattern belongs to Hulita Tu'ifua from the village of Feletoa on the island of Vava'u. I chose this pattern to pay special tribute to Tu'i Tonga, who spread out the *aga`i fenua* (our political system) to `Uvea mo Futuna.

- The mouth

The mouth here is symbolized by the shark teeth. The upper band of teeth also represents the sails of a canoe. In the center are a *kalia* or *la lua* (double canoe with two sails), then some *vaka tafa`aga* (canoes with a beam and one sail), and finally *paopao* (simple canoe without sail).

The lower band of teeth (three large triangles) represents the three kingdoms of `Uvea, and Sigave and Alo in Futuna. Inside these larger triangles I inserted an astral sign, and above it, on top of the triangle, a *lau niu* (coconut leaf) pattern. The *lau niu* is there to show the importance of the coconut for the survival of our islands. I was also inspired by an old, recurrent Uvean and Futunan proverb: “Laga te lau niu o `Uvea mo Futuna ki oluga,” which means “Raise the coconut branch of `Uvea mo Futuna higher.” This proverb is generally used when someone is about to compete, to wake up the pride of Uvean and Futunan people.

- Inside the mouth

The *tanoa* (kava bowl) symbolizes the kava ceremony, which punctuates all the agreements of our traditional society and all the important moments of life. This ritual ceremony is generally followed by a *katoaga*, presenting offerings such as the meat cooked in the *umu* (earth oven), yams, taro, mats, and *ngatu* or *siapo* (*tapa*, bark cloth).

I placed the *tanoa* as decorative band in the middle of the mouth, to show the central place of this ritual ceremony. The *tanoa* in the center corresponding to the *la lua* symbolizes the royal kava ceremony, and the others on the sides represent the *aliki* (chiefly) kava ceremonies.

The two last *tanoa* on each extremity have two meanings. These represent the regular *fai kava* (kava drinking), which Futunans call *tauasu*, and they also represent the *kumete*, the large cooking receptacle. I wanted to pay special tribute to the ancestors who braved the ocean in spite of the *tapu* (prohibition) established by the Catholic missionaries in `Uvea mo Futuna concerning indigenous navigation skills and practices. This is like winking an eye to a pre-European tradition called *Ta Vaka* in my islands. This tradition arose in response to the call of the open sea, and to perpetuate the heroic tradition of navigation. These large cooking receptacles are there in my design to symbolize the courage of Futunan people who decided to transgress the religious *tapu* and to jump on board such *kumete* to sail to the Fiji islands in the late nineteenth century. Uvean people also practiced this tradition, but traveled aboard real canoes, which allowed them to settle in Fisi, Ha`amoa, Tonga, Ouvea Lalo in New Caledonia, Lotuma, Anuta, and Tikopia. The *Ta Vaka* tradition was perpetuated until between 1920 and 1930.

- Agriculture

A decorative band reveals triangles inked with vegetal patterns symbolizing agriculture: *talo* (taro), *ufi* (yam), *mei* (breadfruit), *kumala* (sweet potato). Agriculture is essential for our survival and also important for the practice of our *aga`i fenua*. I placed this pattern here because it is linked to the practice of the *katoaga*.

- The nautical currents

This decorative band presenting two fish bones facing each other is a Samoan pattern. Here I wanted to pay special tribute to Paulo Sulu`ape and to the strength of the

resistance of the Samoan culture regarding the traditional tattoo art. Every tattoo artist from the west to the east and from the north to the south of the Pacific knows the essential contribution of Paulo Sulu'ape to the survival and the revival of the traditional tattoo art over all the Pacific Islands. In my scheme, these fishes symbolize the nautical currents.

- My lineage as a tattooist

Below these two bands, I decided to place a band of three points. My grandmother Sialetaginoa Elisapeta Galu'Ola wore this decorative band on her shoulder. When I saw my grandma's tattoo, I decided to wear the same and started to have an interest in the art of tattoo. She told me that these points represent the stars in the night. Here I wanted to pay special tribute to my *kui fafine*. In my scheme, this band represents my lineage, which starts from my grandmother. I will tattoo and transmit it to all my descendents in loving memory of Sialetaginoa Elisapeta Galu'Ola.

#### MY INTEREST IN TATTOOING

With the exception of (Western) Sāmoa, tattoo art has disappeared on many islands. Sāmoa is the only place where the practice and the meaning of the traditional *tatau*/tattoo art form have never suffered a cultural break. In 'Uvea mo Futuna, this ancient art is not generally practiced. Tattoo art lost its function in the applied mechanism of our *aga`i fenua* once the Catholic missionaries put their feet on our lands. Consequently, the *tufuga fai ta tatau* (tattoo experts) disappeared progressively from our society, since they had no more utility for the well-being of the community. However, I don't think that the practice of this craft was as politicized and generalized as it was in Sāmoa; I think that the stature of tattoo art in 'Uvea and Futuna was similar to that on Tikopia. However, old people still wear old patterns mixed with new ones featuring things such as Latin letters and the Christian cross.

In the last few decades, a revival of the tattoo arts began in many Pacific Islands, but for a long time 'Uvea mo Futuna stayed away from this movement. However, the success of the Tahitian tattoo revival seduces western people, and unfortunately many Pacific Islanders as well, including Uveans and Futunans. When, during my university



education in Paris, I first saw my people there wearing Marquesan patterns on their skin, I decided to tattoo. I told my people in Paris: I am a tattooist and I only tattoo Uvean and Futunan patterns. Then they bought me a tattoo machine. That is how I started my practice.

My interest in the art of tattoo is not to revive it in my islands, because this art form has already lost its function in our *aga`i fenua*. But the expansion and the success of the revival movement in tattoo arts are so strong that it is impossible to swim endlessly against the current. From a Pacific Islander point of view, and conscious that I belong to peoples who originally had the same roots, I think it is insane and disrespectful to the Henua `Enana ancestors to tattoo their Marquesan patterns and to claim to everybody, Pacific Islanders and western people alike, that they are traditional Tahitian tattoo art. I don't want my people to take part in this collective cultural burglary. So I decided to create an Uvean and Futunan style, in the hope that my people would be proud to wear or tattoo our own patterns.

Personally, I don't want to look for something already lost. I prefer living my culture as my ancestors transmitted it to me. I am more interested in the present and in thinking about how I can use what I have today and how I can transmit it. We have to admit the past, not just as tradition but also as history. As long as we consider the past as tradition, we will never walk ahead.

The Uvean or Futunan word for "forward" is *mu`a*, but this term is also used to refer to the past. It has a double meaning: forward, and past or origin. The result is that the past is not behind us but in front of us. In this way, tradition can be present with modernity. The western concept of time does not exist in our communities. The past, the present, and the future are necessarily connected, because real cultural heritage is not something tangible but intangible. It is a way of life.

From that perspective, the question is: What do I have at my disposal? My inspiration, my source, is the *aga`i fenua*, the old tales, the living art of *tapa* and mats, the proverbs, and our Oceanic culture.

As my father Polikalepo Tupalelagi Muliava (a traditional chief and political leader for the Uvean and Futunan communities living in New Caledonia) used to say: "Kote Aga`i Fenua e mole feala ia ke toe laga`i mai te taimi mu`a kā `e faka kaukau`i mo

tufuga`i ia i te `aho fuli pea mo faka tuha kite`u hoha mo amanaki a te kaiga,” which means, “Tradition is not something that we should reconstruct but something to build day after day, following the needs of our communities.” This is the only way to keep culture alive, authentic, and away from any kind of “folklorism,” which is the danger of any sort of traditional revival.

VAIMU`A MULIAVA is a French Pacific Islander, born and raised in New Caledonia. He keeps deep and strong links with `Uvea and Futuna Islands (most well known as Wallis and Futuna). He graduated in 2006 from the University of Paris 1, Panthéon-Sorbonne, with a master’s degree in conservation studies in marine archaeology and ethnographic fields. His thesis was entitled, “La Conservation entre ‘Etic’ et ‘Emic.’” That same year he finished an internship at the Bishop Museum in Honolulu.

### Notes

1. *Aga* is pronounced “anga.” For example, we write “Toga,” but we pronounce it “Tonga.” Uveans don’t write the sound “ng” because the missionaries didn’t write it, but Uveans do pronounce it. It is good to know that the native language has not been modified by the European writing. We could make the parallel with the glottal stop: if I had learned my language at school and not in my family home, I would take this glottal stop as a determining factor for the understanding and practicing of my language.
2. Monsignor Pierre Bataillon, the first Catholic missionary on the island, had an important influence in the conservation of the native tradition by editing in 1870 a code mixing traditional law and religious precepts. He also edited the first Uvean dictionary.

### References

Association Pacifique

1991 *Au pays des trois royaumes*. Paris: Editions Pacifique.

Burrows, Ed

1937 *Ethnology of `Uvea (Wallis Islands)*. Honolulu: Bishop Museum.

*My primary references are:*

*The ancestors’ Fishers of Islands: Maui, Tagaloa, Havea Hikule`o*

*The ancestors’ visionaries: The king Niuliki and his warrior Musumusu who killed the first Catholic missionary of Futuna, Father Pierre Channel. Since then, every year our communities commemorate Saint Pierre Channel, the first Catholic martyr of Oceania, and the king and his warrior are considered murderers and devils.*

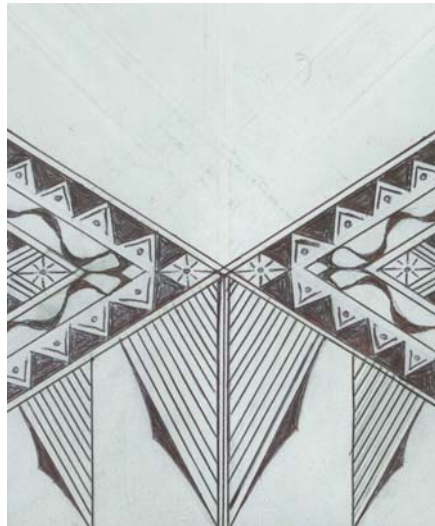
*The defenders of our traditions who passed away: Polikalepo Nau, Lafaele Malau,*

*Kalala Kulimoetoke, Malekalita Tokaga, Petelo Folitu`u, Polikalepo Tupalelagi Muliava*

*The “living libraries”: Selelino Lie, Kimi Seo, Malino Nau . . .*



## *Learning the Pacific*





*Ka Huaka`i*

Brandy Nālani McDougall

*`ekahi*

A greenish squall fell against  
a sharp shard of the night sky.  
Who knew which way was down?  
No whispers could be heard  
when it all turned black—  
no one was there but the sea,  
Kanaloa turning in his sleep,  
wrapped in a turbulent dream:

Kahiki Nui was behind them.  
The great wa`a rose and sank  
with every turn of the ocean,  
but the stars remained, guiding  
the way to the new islands  
Kāne spoke of, his voice, the motion  
of several consumed moons hung  
on the impending horizon.

*`elua*

In the beginning was the Word,  
and the Word was born  
to Papa and Wākea in the dark  
before the light. Hawai`i, it called,  
Maui, then Kāne, Lono, Kanaloa, Kū, Hina, Pele:  
Bring forth your fire in dance,  
your water springs and salt-swept  
waves, your huli kalo for planting,  
your sturdy, ringed trunks of niu.

Stir the darkness around you;  
and bring forth the light— E ala ē!

*Tehura*

*On viewing Gauguin's Mana'o Tupapa'u (The Spirit of the Dead Keeps Watch)*

Brandy Nālani McDougall

The chill of violet around you,  
*Olympia* of Oceania, you lie pito down:  
a burnished, brown body like mine, draped  
over white sheets. And for the moment,  
I can't move—How did we get here?  
Your framed face turning toward mine,  
I see a pleading in your eyes, on your lips  
a moan of dread.

*Quickly, I struck a match, and I saw . . .*  
*Tehura, immobile, naked, lying face downward flat on the bed*  
*with the eyes inordinately large with fear.*

I draw closer to you, mounted on the wall—

*Never had I seen her so beautiful, so tremulously beautiful*

see waves of dark hair tucked  
behind your delicate ear, pulled  
violently from your face, neck.  
Your seduction rendered  
through brush strokes of bronze:  
arching your back, lifting your chin to meet  
a ceaseless stare.

*She . . . seemed not to recognize me. As for myself  
I stood for some moments strangely uncertain*



Behind you, the spirit of the dead,

*in this half-light which was surely peopled for her with dangerous apparitions*

more his than yours, looms in black, stares—

*I was afraid to make any movement . . . Might she not . . . take me for one of the  
Tupapaūs?*

blankly, unbending. In its hand,  
the spark of a bud lights the tiaras  
on your mattress, each blossom opening  
into a glorious sneer.

*. . . and the night was soft, soft and ardent, a night of the tropics . . .*

Tehura, my poki`i,  
in your face I see my own,  
the same curves and shadow twisting  
into a sad silence. I know  
this is not who we are, not Why or How—

only smoke from flailing ghosts, tricks  
of fading light, only the wash of gold paint over  
this rotting wood frame.

Note: Italicized lines are excerpts from Paul Gauguin's autobiography, *Noa Noa: The Tahitian Journal*, translated by O F Theis (New York: Dover Publications, 1985, pages 33–34).

Hailing from Upcountry Maui, BRANDY NĀLANI MCDOUGALL, a 1994 Kamehameha Schools graduate, completed her MFA in poetry from the University of Oregon in 2001 and obtained a Fulbright Study Award (Aotearoa/New Zealand) in 2002. An award-winning poet, McDougall's work has been published in journals and anthologies throughout Hawai'i, the continental United States, and the Pacific. Her first collection will be released in 2007. Currently pursuing a PhD in English from the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa, McDougall works as an assistant editor for Kuleana 'Ōiwi Press, the publisher of *'Ōiwi: A Native Hawaiian Journal*.

*Confessions of a Former History Teacher*

Monica LaBriola

I am sorry.  
For thinking  
I was the teacher.  
For talking  
instead of listening.  
For believing  
and conceiving that  
my ways would  
teach you something about  
your history.  
For preaching  
to the choir.

I am sorry for  
pop quizzes,  
vocabulary tests,  
written exams, and  
tedious notes  
on the overhead projector.  
And for using them  
to gauge how much  
you know about  
your past.

I thought I had what  
I needed to show you  
what you needed

to know.  
The winds of change blew  
yourstories  
right past me.

I should have known that in  
one year  
you could tell me  
more about  
“Micronesian History”  
than I could ever hope to  
learn in a lifetime.

You were *jitdam*.<sup>1</sup>

I am sorry.  
That “F” was meant for me.

1. In Marshallese, *jitdam* means to study one’s genealogy.

*lien Ippān Doon*

*This Time Together*

Monica LaBriola

I was still getting ready when I heard a soft, persistent knock at my door. After a brief pause, I heard the door handle turn and the front door open and close quietly. I knew it was Meria, one of the neighborhood girls, coming to tell me it was time to head over to the birthday party *keemem*.

*“Deḷqñ,”* I called out. “Come on in.”

*“Kwōpojak ke?”* Meria asked. “Are you ready?”

*“Kōttar jidik,”* I told her. “Wait a few minutes. I’m not quite ready.”

I went into my room to finish getting dressed. I put on the aloha-print dress I had had made the previous year for the Christmas celebration and dance competition. To match, I chose some Marshallese handicraft *amimōñō* jewelry and a pretty, handmade Marshallese *ut*—a style of handicraft floral head wreath that women on Ebeye love to wear, especially to parties and to church. I had received this one from a friend a few months earlier after I had made the mistake of admiring it on her one morning after church.

*“Elukkuun aiboojoj ut eo am,”* I had told her. “Your *ut* is very pretty.” She immediately took it off her head and placed it gently on mine.

*“Am,”* she told me with a smile. “It’s yours.”

“I mean, it’s nice on *you!*” I insisted, reaching up to remove the *ut* so I could return it to its rightful owner.

“Marshallese custom,” she said with a smile.

“That’s a tough one to argue,” I said, and we had both laughed as two older ladies passed by and whistled.

*“Shwi-shwu! Likatu!”* they had teased. *“Emman ut ne am!”* they said to me. “Nice *ut.*”

Once I finished getting dressed, I made sure I had everything else I needed—the most important thing being a dollar bill to *jiñap*, or line up and present to the baby while singing a version of “Happy Birthday” in Marshallese. I stashed the dollar bill in my purse and then remembered to grab a few extra to give to my friends in case they didn’t have any with them. I had learned to save up dollar bills after the very first birthday I attended on Ebeye, when a woman standing in line behind me had noticed that I didn’t know what was going on and had stealthily slipped a dollar bill into my hand. I was grateful for her kindness to me, and would gladly pass along the favor to anyone at any time.

Just before closing my bedroom door, I remembered to grab my camera. “This will be a good night to take pictures,” I thought. “Everyone will be dressed up and having a great time.”

*“Ekwe, ipojak,”* I told Meria as I pulled the door shut. “I’m ready. Let’s go!” I was looking forward to having a good time with my friends and family at the *keemem*.

We stepped out of my front door into the sweltering heat. It was already seven o’clock, but the sun had just gone down and it hadn’t rained for almost a month. The air felt heavy and I immediately started to sweat.

*“Kōttar mōk,”* I told Meria. “Let me get a fan before we go.”

*“Kwomaron ke bōktok juon aō?”* she asked. “Can you bring me one, too?”

*“Aaet,”* I replied. “Sure, no problem.”

After I retrieved the fans from my room, we started on our way, taking the usual shortcuts through the back alleys of “Rōk Town” at the south end of Ebeye to the newly built community gym, located at the center of the island close to the dock. By now it was almost completely dark, and I took a small flashlight out of my purse to help us find our way. Luckily there were no muddy puddles for us to avoid, although a bit of rain would have been nice after such a long dry spell. Water catchments were starting to run dry

and boys were missing school in order to fill gallon jugs with water at the filling station, or to take the half-hour ferry ride to Kwajalein to fetch drinking water. The colonel recently had the water faucets relocated so that they were again accessible to everyone from outside the Kwajalein Dock Security Checkpoint (also known as the DSC), rather than just to badge holders, as was often the case. Once it rained he would probably order the faucets to be brought back around to the other side of the DSC, once again making them inaccessible to those without Kwaj privileges.

“Good night,” a man acknowledged us with the standard evening greeting as we passed him on the road.

“Good night,” we replied, even though we weren’t sure who he was.

“Good night, Miss.” This time the greeting came from a group of teenage girls—probably some of my students, I surmised—although I couldn’t see them, since by now it had grown completely dark.

Up ahead I could see that the lights were on at the gym and some people were filing in through the back entrance. Others were standing outside by the fence looking in, listening to the electronic keyboards and the familiar Marshallese melodies that filled the air for blocks around.

“Good night,” I told the girls—although *our* evening had just begun.

---

“The woman sitting up there at the table next to *Bata*,” the old woman informed me,<sup>1</sup> “is the daughter of an *a/ap*. Her family owns land on Ebeye, Kwajalein, Carlos, and many other islands in Kwajalein Atoll. Her father is the *a/ap* for this *wāto*, but could not be here tonight because he is very sick, and so he sent her in his place. That is why she is sitting up there at the head table. My husband’s oldest brother is married to her younger sister.”

I studied the face of the woman sitting up front, convinced I had seen her before. Then I remembered that she had come by the school the week before to pick up her grandson's report card.

I looked around, noticing that the large room now held a couple hundred people. Young children were running around and having a good time together. The rows of white plastic chairs that had been lined up behind the head tables were filling up with women and a few men, although most of the men stood along the sides of the gym, *bwebwenato* (talking story), taking photographs or videos, waiting for things to get started.

More guests were coming in through the back entrance with trays and large plastic containers filled with food. This was going to be a big *keemem*, because the child's grandparents on both sides were well known and highly respected in the Ebeye community. Moreover, the little boy was the first grandchild on the mother's side. Some of their relatives had come from the outer islands, or Majuro, or even as far as Honolulu and the US mainland to attend this important event.

The gym was decorated with balloons, streamers, and coconut-frond *kimej*. A large banner displaying the birthday boy's photograph hung at the front of the room above the stage. The baby was sitting with his mother directly below the banner on the floor just in front of the stage on a woven pandanus-leaf mat, or *jaki*. The band had their equipment set up on the stage and they played one song after another as the guests arrived. The grandfathers greeted people as they entered, and the baby's father walked around nervously making sure everything was in order. I turned around in my seat and noticed the grandmothers and other female family members and family friends at the back of the gym, lining up all the food and plates on long rows of folding tables. The extended family was easy to identify because the men were all wearing matching aloha shirts, while the women wore matching dresses. The baby and his parents also wore clothes made of a similar material and pattern, but a different color from the rest of the family.



The head tables faced the baby's mat area and were decorated with green tablecloths and balloons. A bottle of water and a drinking coconut, *ni*, had been set at each place. Several seats at the tables were still vacant, waiting to be filled by the VIPs who were expected to arrive any minute.

The proposed start time for the *keemem* was 7:00 pm and it was now approaching nine o'clock. Things would start soon.

---

"Who are the two women taking their seats next to the *a/ap*'s daughter?" I asked, even though I knew the answer. I hoped this kind of questioning would show my friend that I was interested in learning more about Marshallese culture.

"That is our *Lerooj* and one of her daughters," the old woman responded. "The *Lerooj* is the most prominent and highly respected woman on this island. Her great-grandmother was older than my grandfather. Her oldest brother is one of the *Irooj/ap/ap*, or high chiefs for parts of this island and many other islands in Kwajalein Atoll. Her other brother is also a chief, or *Irooj*, and is a senator for Kwajalein Atoll.

"Did you see the way that young girl gathered her skirt and bent over when she walked in front of the table where they are sitting? That is one of the ways we show respect to our leaders, and also to people who are older than us. We must lower our bodies and excuse ourselves as we pass by saying, '*Jo!ok bōd*,' which means, 'Throw away my mistake'—in other words, 'Excuse me for being disrespectful and walking in front of you.'"

"Do the *Irooj* and *a/ap* attend every *keemem*?" I asked.

"For large celebrations like this, we are expected to invite our traditional leaders, and they are expected to attend. If they cannot make it because they are busy or are not on the island, then they send a representative in their place. It would be unheard of for them to be absent without someone coming to represent them. It is our obligation to

invite them, and it is their obligation to attend. Not like our new government leaders—we invite them, but often they do not come or send anyone in their place.”

I watched the *Lerooj* and her daughter take their seats. One of the baby’s grandfathers immediately approached them and extended his hand in greeting. Meanwhile, another young woman passed in front of the table. As she did, she lowered her head, bent forward, and gathered her skirt with one hand. She noticeably avoided looking directly at the head table. The young woman—whose clothing indicated that she was a member of the baby’s family—approached the baby’s mother, who gave her a large plastic shopping bag. From it, the young woman took several *amimōño* (handicraft) flowers. Still bent over slightly, the woman approached the head table. Avoiding direct eye contact, she said something to the *Lerooj*, and then placed one of the flowers behind the woman’s ear. She then did the same for the *Lerooj*’s daughter and the *alap*’s daughter, and then made her way through the rows of plastic chairs. She approached each woman as she had the women at the head table, repeating the same phrase each time before placing the flower behind each woman’s ear. Just as I began to wonder what it was she was saying, she approached first my friend, and then me.

*“Jo!qok bōd,”* she said as she placed the flower behind my ear.

*“Ejje!qok, kom̃mool,”* I said, thanking her for the beautiful gift.

---

At that point, the music ended and the room began to grow quiet as a man approached the podium. The young woman continued with her task of distributing the handmade flowers.

“What’s going on?” I asked my friend.

*“Ej jinoe,”* she replied. “The *keemem* is starting.”

“Who is that up there on the stage?” I persisted.

“Tom?” she asked. “He is the emcee. He is a close relative of the birthday family and is good at speaking in front of people. And he is funny. He is also my relative. My

mother is older than his grandfather. Tonight it's his job to keep the *keemem* flowing smoothly and also to ensure adherence to our custom, our *m̄anit*."

"What do you mean?"

"Well, let's see. He makes sure the *keemem* doesn't start until all the right people are here, like the *Irooj* or *Lerooj* and the *a/ap*, for example. He also sees to it that the *Lerooj* and her family are served their food first before everyone else gets in line to make their plates. *Ekwe, jen jab keroro kiō bwe rej itōn jinoe*. Let's be quiet now, because it's going to start."

"*lōkwe in jota*," the emcee said into the microphone. "Good evening." There was a faint muffled reply from the guests.

"What was that?" he laughed. "*Bar juon m̄ōk*. Let's try it again. *lōkwe in jota*," he said more loudly this time.

"*lōkwe in jota*," the guests responded, this time with a bit more enthusiasm and some scattered laughter.

"*M̄oktata ikōnaan kam̄moolol Anij kōn iienin ippān doon*," Tom continued. "First, I would like to thank God for this time together, for this opportunity to celebrate the life of baby Christopher, who today celebrates his first birthday. On behalf of Christopher's family, I would like to extend a warm welcome to all of you who have come together to celebrate this occasion, and in particular to our *Lerooj* and her family, and to all the *a/ap* and their families who have joined us here this evening. Let us also take a moment to remember those members of the family in particular who could not be here with us tonight because they are far away from home, as well as those who are sick or have passed away.

"I would like to welcome *Bata* Joe, who is here with us tonight, to start the celebration by offering a blessing over the baby and his family, and to bless the food before we begin our meal together. *Bata* Joe..."

“*Kom̃mool*, Tom,” *Bata* Joe thanked the emcee. “It is my great honor to be present here this evening. *Jen kam̃moolol Anij kōn iienin ippān doon. Im bar kam̃moolol kom̃ kōn ami kar koba tok ilo jōtiin rainiin.* Let us once again thank God for giving us this time together, and for this opportunity to come together this evening to celebrate the life of Christopher. Before I proceed with the blessing, I would like to acknowledge everyone who has gathered this evening to make this event possible, and in particular our *Lerooj* and her daughter, as well as all the *a/ap* and their families. It is wonderful to see so many familiar faces, as well as the many family members who have traveled such long distances to be here this evening. If the father and mother of the baby would please stand, I will proceed with the blessing of the child.”

*Bata* Joe then stepped down from the stage, taking the microphone with him. I stretched my neck up in the hope of catching a glimpse of what was going on, although by that time all the rows of chairs had filled and it was difficult to see through all the people sitting in front of me. By the time I had adjusted myself so that I could see the family, *Bata* had already extended his arm with his open palm resting in midair just over the baby’s head. The mother and father stood quietly with their heads bowed. They must be feeling nervous now that the big event has finally started, I thought to myself.

*Bata* was speaking a soft blessing into the microphone and, even though the room was almost completely silent by then, it was almost impossible to hear what he was saying. I looked around and saw that most of the adults in the gym had their heads bowed slightly. Some were shushing the little children, encouraging them to be quiet during the prayer. “*lien jar*,” they whispered. “It’s time to pray.” I didn’t dare lean over to ask my friend what *Bata* was saying, although I had a pretty good idea.

When *Bata* Joe finished his blessing, he began to speak a bit more loudly into the microphone. This time, I could hear that he was offering the blessing over the evening and the food.

Then, “*Jouj im jutak*,” I heard him say. “Please stand.”

Everyone who was sitting down stood up as *Bata* began the prayer. When he finished, he asked all of us to join him in a song. This one I knew from church, as did most people, and I was glad to be able to join in the singing:

|                         |                    |
|-------------------------|--------------------|
| <i>Anij iḡkwe</i>       | God of love,       |
| <i>Anij in jouj,</i>    | God of kindness,   |
| <i>oṇaake im</i>        | protect us         |
| <i>kojpārok kōj.</i>    | and care for us.   |
| <i>Im kōn men in</i>    | For this we        |
| <i>kōmij kaṇṇoolol,</i> | give you           |
| <i>eḷap joñan</i>       | our highest        |
| <i>maroñ ba.</i>        | thanks and praise. |

|                                  |                             |
|----------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| <i>Kwar kapooḷ iō</i>            | You filled me               |
| <i>kōn aṇ iḡkwe.</i>             | with your love.             |
| <i>Oṇaake iō</i>                 | Protect me                  |
| <i>jān aō jorrāān.</i>           | from harm.                  |
| <i>Tōl im dābij iō</i>           | Lead me and hold me         |
| <i>ilo lḡpiden.</i>              | in the palm of your hand.   |
| <i>Lḡpiden pāin ij aenōṇṇan.</i> | In the palm of your hand,   |
|                                  | I am at peace. <sup>2</sup> |

The perfect four-part harmony filled the gym, growing progressively louder as more and more men, women, and children joined in. It sounded so beautiful that my eyes began to swell up with tears, and the hair on my arms stood up straight for just a second. As the next round started, I stopped singing just so I could stand and listen for a while.

---

By the time we started getting in line for our food, the gym had grown extremely hot, even though it was almost ten o'clock. Many of the women were carrying *amimōño* fans like the one I had brought and were fanning themselves and their children as we stood in line. I made sure to fan my friend, too, since she had forgotten hers and was obviously very hot.

"*Lale mōk*," she began. "All the people sitting at the head table have their food already. The *Lerooj* and her family were the first to receive their plates and drinks, and then *Bata* and the *aḷap*."

I looked over. Besides his or her bottle of water and drinking coconut (*ni*), each person at the head table now also had a can of soda and two styrofoam take-out plates of food.

"Why do they all have two plates?" I asked.

"One plate is probably filled with meats, or *jālele*," she said, "and the other is filled with rice, salad, and all the best side dishes and local foods. The baby's family has also set aside plates for those members of the families of the *Lerooj* and other *Irooj* who couldn't make it here tonight, and they will deliver them to their homes later on. Did you know that, in our custom, only certain people can cook food for and serve the *Irooj* and his family? This is one of the other ways in which we *kairoojooj* or show respect to our chiefs."

"Wow, they really get special treatment," I said in a lowered voice.

My friend looked a bit surprised at my comment and was quiet for a minute. I wondered if I had offended her. Then she looked around and responded quietly, "We do treat them differently, but that's out of respect for our *mānit*. *Ekar nān jabōnkōnnaan ej ba, 'Jede ak eo.'* This saying reminds us to respect our *Irooj*, who are like frigate birds. But you must keep in mind that, as *Irooj*, they also have special responsibilities and obligations. There are things they are expected to do as well."

"Like what?" I asked in a louder voice, trying to be heard over the noise of the band, which had started playing again right after the prayer.

*“Jen etal im bōk kijed ṁōñā ṁokta,”* she replied. “Let’s get our food first, and then I will tell you more.”

The line for the food seemed like it was about a mile long, stretching all the way around the gym, and even out the back door. Some people stayed in their seats, waiting for it to get shorter, while others asked their younger friends or relatives to stand in line for them. As I finally approached the table, I noticed that an assembly line of the baby’s family members were dishing up the plates for us. The first person hurriedly grabbed a styrofoam take-out plate, filled one section with plain and fried *raij*, or rice, and then passed it on to the woman next to her, who served one *raij bobo* rice ball and a scoop of potato salad. Next came a small portion of noodles, and then a series of *ṁōñā in ṁajeļ* or Marshallese foods including *jaajmi* (sashimi), banana and grated coconut *jukjuk*, arrowroot or tapioca starch and grated coconut *ṁākṁok*, preserved breadfruit *bwiro*, a slice of *kwanjin mā* or roasted breadfruit, and boiled pandanus *peru* with starch, grated coconut, and coconut juice. These local foods were some of my favorites, and I could hardly wait to get back to my seat and try each one.

Just when it seemed like a plate was completely full, one of the servers passed it further down the line where still more women were serving different kinds of meat, which they placed right on top of all the other dishes that had already been served. Some of the choices included barbequed chicken and steak, short ribs, pork, and, of course, fish.

“Where did all the fish come from?” I asked my friend as I picked out a can of soda for her from the enormous cooler at the end of the table.

*“Jān ‘outer island’,”* she replied. “The baby’s parents’ families sent them and brought them from the outer islands. I think the father also asked some of his relatives to go out fishing around here. They probably brought in some of those small fish from the lagoon, and some of that *jaajmi* might be from the ocean side.”

I quickly grabbed a couple of bottles of water and followed my friend back to our seats.

---

"I'll never be able to finish all this," I laughed as I looked down at my lap, where my plate sat, overflowing with food.

"You are not supposed to finish it," my friend told me. "Just eat until you are full. Then after everyone gets their food, you can go and fill it up again and take the plate home with you. That is our custom. The family doesn't want to be left with lots of food at the end of the *keemem*. They want us to enjoy it and take it home to share with our family members who didn't attend. Tomorrow you won't have to cook!"

As we began to eat, Tom came back on stage to announce that it was time for the entertainment portion of the evening to begin. By now, it was almost 10:30 pm.

"Several groups have prepared songs and dances for the birthday boy and his family." He then turned and looked off stage and said into the microphone, "Can the first group please get ready? The first act will start in ten minutes."

I brought my chair a little closer to my friend with the hope that we could continue the conversation we started in the food line. But she seemed more interested in sitting quietly and looking around to see who was present at the *keemem*. As I sat eating a piece of roasted breadfruit, I felt someone approach us from behind. I turned my head and saw the face of an older man whom I did not recognize. My friend turned around, looked up, and smiled.

"O, *iqkwe!* *Kwar itok nāāt?!?*" she said, obviously excited to see the familiar face. "When did you get here?" The two of them talked for a few minutes before she turned to introduce me to him. "This is my cousin," she told me with a smile. "He lives in Hawai'i and hasn't been back to the island for a long time. My mother is younger than his father."

I extended my hand to greet him. "*iqkwe,*" I said, and he returned my greeting with a "*iqkwe*" and a firm handshake.



Then my friend turned to where her granddaughter was sitting, and brought her around to meet her cousin. “*Eñin ej leddik eo jibū, nājin lio e rūttotata nejū,*” she told her cousin. “This is my granddaughter, my oldest daughter’s daughter.”

The two of them continued talking in this way for several minutes until my friend’s cousin said it was time to return to his seat.

“*Būbū, wōn eo?*” my friend’s young granddaughter asked her inquisitively.

“*Jimam eo,*” she replied. “That’s your grandfather.” The girl looked over at the man for a minute, and then went back to eating preserved breadfruit *bwiro* from a little plastic baggie.

“It must be hard for children to keep track of all their relatives,” I said to my friend, partly joking.

“*Aet,*” she replied. “Yes, especially these days. That’s one of the reasons parties like these are so fun and important for us Marshallese, us *rimaje!* They give us a chance to see our relatives and get to know people we didn’t even know were members of our family or our clan—our *jowi*. If we see someone at a *keemem* or a funeral, we might ask, ‘Why is that person here?’ And then we find out they are also related in some way. In Marshallese we call it *jitdam kapeel*.”

“What is *jitdam kapeel*?” I asked her.

“*Jitdam kapeel* means something like learning about who your family members are—like learning about your family tree. But it also means learning about custom, about Marshallese culture, about our role and our place in our family and in our society. *Jitdam kapeel* can mean learning what it is to be a daughter or a brother, how to show respect to people who are older or from older generations, how to respect our *lrooj*, and much more. It also means teaching young people who their relatives are so they can know who they can and cannot marry or date—who can be *koba* and who cannot—according to our *manit*.”

“*Jitdam kapeel* is kind of like what we have been doing here tonight. You have been asking me questions, and I have been trying to explain our customs and our

culture to you. If you were my own daughter, I would point out our relatives and explain how they are related to us, much as I have been doing with my granddaughter. Parties and especially funerals are the perfect opportunities to do this because there are so many people present and so much is going on. We tell our children about certain people and customs every day at home, but it is during large gatherings like these that we have the chance to actually see peoples' faces and put many of our customs into practice."

Tom came back on stage to announce the first performance. Before the music started, my friend leaned over and finished what she had been saying to me. "These are not things you can learn in a book," she said. "You can only learn them by asking, seeing, and doing. That is our custom. These parties are times to ask, to listen, to see, and to do."

---

I laughed and cheered along with the rest of the crowd as my friend made her way up to the front of the gym with my *amimōho* fan in one hand and a bottle of perfume in the other. She had her arms up in the air, and was dancing along to the beat of the music as she went, stopping every few feet to shake her hips a bit and smiling all the way. The crowd roared with laughter each time she paused to try out a new move.

My friend's son was up on stage performing a dance number with some of his classmates, and she was heading straight for them. Once up on stage, she placed herself directly behind her son and began imitating his every move in a slightly exaggerated fashion. When the dancers reached one of the more complex portions of their dance number, my friend began to vigorously fan her son as the audience cheered her on. She then proceeded to spray each of the dancers with perfume. Throughout all this, the boys tried their best to keep straight faces and to go on dancing without interruption, but they found it increasingly difficult as one of the baby's grandmothers joined my friend on stage with yet another bottle of perfume and a bag full of T-shirts, one of which she began to drape over each boy's shoulders.

And then, just as quickly as she had gone up, my friend returned to her seat. She had a huge grin on her face and people were still laughing at her antics on stage. After she sat down, I noticed she was sweating from the heat, so I handed her a bottle of water and told her to keep the fan. As if nothing had happened, she turned her attention back to the stage. By then a group of young girls had started a hula dance. We heard laughter erupt on one side of the gym, and when we looked over to see what was going on, we saw another old woman making her way up to the stage.

After several more dance numbers, Tom returned to the stage to announce the last performance. I noticed the baby's relatives (many of whom had been serving food earlier in the evening) off to one side of the gym getting ready to make their entrance. They were all dressed in the matching clothes I had noticed earlier—the women in dresses and the men in aloha shirts and dark pants—and each was carrying a plastic shopping bag in one hand. The music started, and after a brief pause, the dancers formed two lines and began to slowly *maaj* or parade up to the front of the gym to the rhythm of Marshallese electronic keyboard music. The baby's father led the men and the mother led the women with the baby in her arms.

This performance would be different from all the others. As soon as the two lines of dancers got to the front of the gym and began to dance, an old woman approached the baby's mother and started undressing the baby—right down to his diaper. The audience erupted in laughter and people began to clap and cheer. A minute later, the baby's grandmother appeared with a new outfit and helped the mother dress him. The baby and his mother then rejoined the dancers, but a few minutes later another woman went up, again stripped the baby down to his diaper, and took the clothes with her to her seat. By now, the audience was excited, and everyone was having a good time laughing and cheering.

I leaned over to my friend. "Why are they taking the baby's clothes?" I asked her.

"That is our custom," she told me. "Some guests will even go up and take the *jaki* mat and blankets from where the baby and his family have been sitting tonight. And the

family must give them freely. You see, a *keemem* is about celebrating, which for us *rimaje/* means giving and sharing, and practicing our customs. These are some of the ways the family celebrates the life and well-being of their child.”

By this time, the baby was in his diaper again, and would stay that way until the dancing was over, since it appeared the grandmother was out of new outfits. At this time, one of the father’s relatives opened up his plastic bag, took out a T-shirt, and threw it into the audience. Several people jumped up and tried to catch the shirt, but it landed in the lap of an old man who was sitting close to us. Everyone’s attention went immediately back to the front of the room, because by that time all the dancers had opened up their bags and began throwing more things out into the audience. There were T-shirts, Marshallese-style “*nuknuk in Guam*” or “Guam dresses” as they are called, *jodi* flip-flops, sandals, and socks, and even a few packages of plastic cups and plates. Guests stood up to catch the items as they flew through the air, and children dove for the things that landed on the floor. My friend nudged me and pointed to the front of the gym, where I saw a woman run up and take the *jaki* mat from the floor. One person ran up and jokingly reached for the birthday banner, although he couldn’t reach it. Another woman went up and took the *jodi* sandals right off the baby’s mother’s feet, and held them up in triumph as she ran back toward her seat. The dancers and the audience all laughed and cheered as the woman hurriedly ducked into her seat, laughing but no longer wanting to be the center of attention.

---

As we stood in line together, my friend pulled a dollar bill from her purse and handed it to me.

“*Ej emman wōt,*” I told her. “It’s okay, I have one.”

“*Āinwōt juon,*” she said. “Never mind, just take this one.” By now, I had learned it would be rude to refuse this kind of offer, so I took the dollar bill from my friend’s hand, even though I had been hoping to share one with her this time.

As we stood in the long line, which by this time stretched all the way around the gym, the band concluded a local rendition of “Happy Birthday” and transitioned into one of my favorites:

*lien em̃man, 'm̃man,*

*joj ej llo doon.*

*A' etto ad jab*

*itwale<sup>3</sup> tok eok.*

*Kwon jijet tok*

*ljo 'jo iturū ilo*

*m̃ool in am̃ m̃ool.*

This wonderful moment,

as we see each other here.

It has been such a long time

since you have gathered together with us.

Come and sit here.

next to me,

and bring with you all

that you are and

all the truth that you hold.<sup>4</sup>

“This song represents what I was telling you about earlier,” my friend began. “It is all about *'lien em̃man,*’ that wonderful moment when families, clans, and communities come together during parties, sometimes meeting each other for the very first time.

*“lien ippān doon,”* she continued. “This time we spend together is precious because it gives us an opportunity to work together, to get to know each other better, and to learn about and celebrate our families, our customs, our history. *Ekar ñan jabōnkōnnaan ej ba, 'Amān akā eo.*’ This saying means that times like these are not just meant for remembering important events like the birth of a baby or the life of someone who has died. They also represent new beginnings, new opportunities. These moments, these *lien ippān doon,* are important because they represent the coming together of many generations of people, as well as their stories, their memories, and their knowledge of our history and of our *m̃anit*. These events give everyone a chance to learn

a little bit more about *m̃antin m̃ajeŋ* and what it means to be *rim̃ajeŋ*. On nights like these we ask, we listen, we see, and we do. This is how we learn. This is how we know. This is how we celebrate.”



*Photo 1. Iien keemem. Rim̃ajeŋ consider the first birthday the most significant and celebrate accordingly. While some commemorate the day with small, private keemem in their homes, others invite their extended families, friends, and neighbors for the special event. Here, two families hold a joint keemem, hosting not just their families and friends, but also the entire Queen of Peace Parish community. Ebeye, 2001. Photo by Brian Green.*

My friend nudged me forward, as I had fallen behind a bit in line. As we approached the front of the gym, I took out my dollar. As I shook Christopher’s tiny hand, I dropped the dollar on the pile of money and gifts that had accumulated on the floor next to the family.

“Happy Birthday,” I said as I pinched his cheeks.

"Happy Birthday *im jeraammon ilo raan in am*," I heard my friend say as I turned to head back to my seat. "Happy Birthday and congratulations on your special day."

---

As I gathered up my things, I looked around and noticed that most of the people had already left. One of the baby's aunties was walking around with a container full of leftover rice, spooning it onto peoples' plates. Several other women were scattered around the room distributing salads, meat, and drinks. Some of the younger girls were already busy picking up trash and sweeping the floor, while the men took down tables and chairs, helped the band disassemble their equipment, and began loading empty containers and coolers into the back of several pickup trucks. Baby Christopher was fast asleep in his father's arms.

"*Etal wōt*," my friend told me as she gathered up her things. "You go ahead. I am going to stay here for a while to help clean up. And here, you take this T-shirt. It's your size."

"*Ejjab!*" I exclaimed. "You keep it. Won't it fit someone in your family?"

"*Āinwōt juon*," she said. "Never mind. You just take it."

"*Ekwe, komṁool*," I told her once again. "Thank you."

"My son is going to walk you home," she told me. "It's too late for you to walk by yourself."

"Are you sure I shouldn't stay and help out?" I asked.

"*Ejjab*," she replied. "*Etal im kiki*. Go home and get some sleep. You look tired."

"*Ekwe*, good night," I told my friend. "*Im komṁool kōn am kar jitdaṁe eō*. Thank you for teaching me so many things."

"*Kōn jouj*," she said with a smile. "You're welcome, with pleasure."

By the time my friend's son and I started to walk toward my house, it was almost two o'clock in the morning. The streets were quiet and only a few people were out. The heat had subsided and a cool breeze was blowing.

“Good night,” a man said as we passed him on the sidewalk.

“Good night,” we responded in unison.

My friend’s son looked up at the sky and smiled. “*Enaaj wōt*,” he said. “It’s going to rain. Tomorrow will be another day of celebrating, as the rain fills our catchments with fresh water. Everyone will be busy cleaning up and doing their laundry.”

“*Emman*,” I said as we approached my front door. “That’s good. *Ekwe, komṁool bwe kwar āñintok eō ñan ṁweo imō*. Thank you for walking me home.”

“*Kōn jouj*,” he said walking down the stairs.

As I shut the front door, I heard tiny drops of rain begin to fall one by one on the tin roof. By the time I closed my eyes to fall asleep, it was pouring.

*I gratefully acknowledge John deBrum, Julie Walsh Kroeker, Maryia deBrum, and Wanda Korok for their help with the drafting of this narrative, as well as all those who have taken the time to sit down with me and share their knowledge at parties and other occasions over the years. Although fictional, the events I describe in this story are based on my own experiences at keemem on Ebeye over the past five years. (This story first appeared as a series of chapters or interludes in “Ien Ippān Doon (This Time Together): Celebrating Survival in an ‘Atypical Marshallese Community,’” a master’s thesis in Pacific Islands studies submitted to the University of Hawai`i at Mānoa.)*

MONICA LABRIOLA is an East–West Center graduate degree fellow pursuing her PhD in Pacific history at the University of Hawai`i at Mānoa. She recently completed her master’s degree in Pacific Islands studies at UH Mānoa; her thesis won the prestigious Norman Meller Research Award for the 2005–2006 academic year. Born in Dayton, Ohio, Monica moved to San Francisco when she was in high school. She attended the University of California at Berkeley, where she earned a BA in peace and conflict studies. After working as a grants assistant at the James Irvine Foundation in San Francisco, she lived and traveled extensively in the Marshall Islands, teaching for two years at Queen of Peace High School with Jesuit Volunteers International, and for one year at Ebeye Public Elementary School. Monica now lives in Honolulu with her husband and stepson. In addition to pursuing full-time graduate study, she works part-time as a policy and legal researcher for the UH Mānoa Chancellor’s Office.



*Notes*

<sup>1</sup> “The old woman” and “my friend” in the rest of the piece represent a composite of all the kind elderly women who took the time to *jitdam kapeel* with me.

<sup>2</sup> Thank you to John deBrum for his help with this translation.

<sup>3</sup> Actual spelling unknown (*“itwale”*).

<sup>4</sup> Thank you to Maryia deBrum and John deBrum for their help with the transcription and translation of this song.

*Other Peoples' Flowers:*

*Some Personal Reflections on Researching as an Outsider*

Christopher Robbins

*I'm an American  
paid by the Japanese  
to say how you think*

I hadn't intended anything so lofty (or insidious) when I applied to the Japanese International Cooperation Agency (JICA) for a research grant entitled "Maximising the Benefits of ICT/Multimedia in the South Pacific: Cultural Pedagogy and Usability Factors" (Robbins 2004), while working at the Media Centre of the University of the South Pacific (USP). I just wanted to think in a practical way about how "we" could make technology that would be useful "here," with "you" in mind. As the educational multimedia developer for a university serving twelve island nations in the South Pacific, I knew that my target audience differed substantially from the people I had been focusing on when I worked in the United States and Europe, so I began to look for ways to determine just how my approach should differ. Situated in an urban office in the capital city of Fiji, thousands of kilometers from the students I was supposed to design for, I knew I had to find other perspectives.

I began by meeting with staff and students from as many countries as I could within USP's scope, and received a grant to extend this research into the countries themselves. In a region ignored by the focus groups that determine the design of technology and software, my goal was to determine how educators and students in the South Pacific could best use computers for educational purposes. The initial question was: How exactly should I design software so that it would be most usable and useful for the people of the region?

Yet the questions got bigger, and pretty soon I wasn't just talking about computers and people but found myself making broad pronouncements about "Learning in the Pacific" (unsure if I should say "in Oceania" instead). Even simple pronouns like

“we,” I,” and “you” seemed to need defining. And what could “here” possibly mean when it referred to twelve different countries scattered over thirty-three million square kilometers of ocean?

*i fear  
like so many white fingers  
trying to force new flowers  
into a tightly wound kakala  
that i'll never get in  
or i'll unravel it  
and string petals  
without ever understanding  
how it was woven  
in the first place*

Over the past year, I had been looking at learning approaches in the South Pacific, trying to figure out how to create educational multimedia that would catered to these approaches. After reading some of the work of Konai Helu Thaman (1992, 1997, 1999, 2000, 2002, 2003), Richard Wah (1997), and Ruby Va'a (1997, 2000), I wanted to put what I had read into action in the area of multimedia. My goal was not to promote the use of multimedia as such, but rather to promote a consideration of how multimedia tools might be used in the regional context. Of course, to accomplish this assumed that I *could* understand the regional context, and that multimedia tools were appropriate.

#### THE PLAN

In preparing for this project I continued my reading. Alongside the dialogues on indigenous pedagogy and epistemology, I read those of post-colonialism and cultural imperialism. Thus, alongside the voices that advised me how I might better understand the diverse cultures of the region were those that told me I had no right to do so. As Claire Smith, Heather Burke, and Graeme Ward put it, “in some quarters, any research relating to cultural matters by outsiders might not be welcomed by Indigenous peoples”

(2000, 19). And in this age of international aid and good governance, “the precise point at which interest and concern become imperializing appropriation is a hotly contested one” (Hutcheon 1995, 133).

When considered within the context of the Oceania’s legacy of colonialism, the drive to understand the region’s cultures in terms of “western” formal education and, more recently, technology, can be seen as another post-colonial “settling” of Oceanic culture. Are these efforts—which are funded, defined, and directed by the “post-colonizers”—condemned to be useless to the cultures they are aimed at? More perniciously, are they part of a postmodern colonization of those aspects of Oceanic cultures the colonizers have not yet managed to westernize? As Linda Tuhiwai Smith has phrased it, “research was talked about in terms of its absolute worthlessness to us, the indigenous world, and its absolute usefulness to those who wielded it as an instrument. It told us things already known, suggested things that would not work, and made careers for people who already had jobs” (1999, 3).

There were distinctions based on geography, ethnicity, and history that I needed to make as a researcher, but others I felt I had no right, as an outsider, to be claiming. Although my lines of questioning—Which layout do you prefer? What parts of this program did you find helpful?—were unlikely to stir up questions of cultural heritage and ownership, I was still uncomfortable making generalizations about others’ cultures based on their responses.

To deal with these concerns, I developed two basic guidelines for my work, in addition to the obvious ones of providing feedback and transparency with informants:

1. Do not approach this as a comparative study. “The West” does not constitute a norm against which to evaluate other cultures; rather, examine people’s approaches to learning in their own contexts.

I took this approach very seriously, going so far as to avoid framing the study as a search for the most effective ways of using educational technology in the region, as that would necessarily have defined learning approaches by how well they succeeded within established western institutional constructs. Rather, I aimed to learn the various ways in

which regional learning approaches could be applied to educational multimedia development. Although I tested the practicality of solutions suggested in later stages of the project, I was careful not to let utility serve as a structuring research question.

2. Be aware of the all-too-easy trap of using “culture” as an unassailable mystifier.

I found it became easy to hide behind the enticing veneer of “culturespeak” (Goldsmith 2003), labeling everything as “cultural.” Parents, class, or choice of academic major play important roles that will be buried if we always resort to the often loosely defined but exciting catchall of “culture.” In other words, the term “culture” could often become a vague cover for something more specific. So I needed to remind myself, “If you are talking about USP students, focus on USP students. If you are talking about urban students, or I-Kiribati students, be sure to construct your sample accordingly.” Without these reminders, I found I could create potentially false distinctions of “traditional culture” or “Micronesian culture,” when I was really speaking of much more specific distinctions. For example, a generalization about the importance of creating educational technology that targets “Micronesian culture” was met with respectful nods, and it took internal searching for me to realize I was really targeting urban students in Kiribati. Thus, the notion of culture, used sloppily, often tended to mystify rather than clarify my research questions.

#### THE PROCESS

Before I discuss the limitations I encountered during the study itself (as opposed to the conceptual bogeymen I unearthed during my background research), I’d like to start with a poem I wrote “at” me from what I imagined to be an insider’s perspective:

*among roots*  
*i feel your thoughts*  
*starving*  
  
*between roots*

*“i cannot speak for them”*

*you try*

*it’s easy to gaze at*

*and clip*

*other people’s flowers*

*they’re not using them*

*you say*

*so i must*

I say “what I imagined” because that is as close as I ever came to experiencing firsthand the resistance from Islanders that I feared after my literature review. Having read so many heated debates on outsider research, I expected some backlash when I actually began to conduct my own. Instead, I found a diverse group of helpful colleagues glad to see their cultures the focus of educational technology development, and eager to contribute their ideas and experiences.

However, I do realize that most dissent aimed at my work will be exhibited through silence or inaction, or expressed in venues to which I am not privy. There is no licensing system for researching another’s culture, and any created in the current post-colonial environment would likely be defined by the same foreign constructs such a system would aim to avoid. The true check of power (which I must assume I unwittingly encounter with regularity) are the silences and polite lies of those I interview, which I often mistakenly attribute to shyness or misguided attempts to tell me what they think I want to hear.

An example of this occurred during the process of translating the educational multimedia. After we completed development of the project in English, we translated the audio and visual materials into a dozen different languages used in the South Pacific. When one of the Solomon Islands Pidgin translators was making corrections to his work, I noticed that he was having some difficulty reading the text. I found him speaking the terms out loud—in a way, he was listening rather than simply reading. When I asked him why, he responded that he found it difficult to read the text, since people didn’t usually

write out long passages in Pidgin, and that its proper use was more as a spoken language than a written one.

I enquired further: “So, what language would you tend to write and read in?”

He responded: “English. But speak it in Pidgin.”

The translator had diligently transcribed entire passages in Pidgin so they could be displayed as text along with the voiceovers in the multimedia, yet he felt uncomfortable informing me that it was a useless exercise. This reminded me of the town criers who had agreed to publicize training sessions I had organized as a Peace Corps Volunteer. Knowing full well that the announced activities were taking place at times that conflicted with most people’s schedules, or had no practical use in the village, they made the pointless announcements as a benefit to me. I imagine they did it out of a sense of goodwill toward the plans about which I was clearly so excited.

Thus at that point I assumed that silences—both of dissent and of information not offered—were my greatest limitations. It would require many more years in more social venues, developing more personal relationships with colleagues, for me to begin to receive the feedback I sought; yet there will always remain ideas off-limits or incomprehensible to me.

For instance, there is a set of “Pacific” concepts that are mystical to me, such as the notion of cyclical time, which I was unable to distill into the structured forms necessary for inclusion in a research report. I encountered ideas, such as interconnectedness and personal relationships in learning approaches, which informed my work on the surface level, and had much deeper repercussions than my more “objective” or dispassionate experience with education was able to accommodate. In a way, I embrace these limitations as an outsider because they protect these concepts from my potential mistranslation and appropriation.

And so, unable and unwilling to represent an authentic voice of Oceania myself, I felt it necessary to limit my role to that of collator rather than creator of ideas, making explicit the cultural biases and limitations implicit in that role. First, as an outsider, I could not possibly comprehend fully the culture I was trying to understand, and certainly not in a one-year research and development project largely conducted from behind a desk or interviewer’s clipboard (though occasionally under a tree chewing betel nut or seated

around a tanoa). Therefore, I limited my conclusions to those given to me by the people whose cultures I encountered.

Second, as an outsider, I had no right to try to determine the tools, constructs, priorities, and applications of understanding another culture (Kathie Irwin, cited in Smith 1999, 38). To attempt to do so would be to perpetuate the colonial history of subsuming (exploiting and annihilating) the culture of the “other,” a practice still very much alive when foreign constructs still define so much. As Bobby Sykes put it, “What? Post-colonialism? Have they left?” (quoted in Smith 1999, 24).

So where does that leave me? It seems I must accept that I am ill equipped by virtue of my heritage to do what interests me most here, and I must admit that the solutions I try to develop that will allow me to work within another’s culture boil down to more attempts to humble and make objective a role considered by many to be intrinsically self-important and subjective.

I should point out that I have polarized my views to make my concerns more obvious. The implications of these reflections would seem to be that I cannot and should not work here in the Pacific. Yet I do, and find it fulfilling and invigorating. I have much to learn, and am excited to do so. I feel that my role is valuable, even if only as a chopping block for people from the region to use to cut through to deeper understandings.

## THE RESULT

The aim of providing a chopping block that staff and students can use to select their own approaches and develop their own learning materials became central to the development of educational multimedia in this study. Rather than employing prescriptive strategies designed to accommodate specific regional learning approaches, I focused on providing a broad and adaptive toolset that relied on staff and student selection and modification (Robbins 2004, 2006a, 2006b).

For instance, one facet of development dealt with providing alternate ways of experiencing the same information: simple outlines, exploratory graphical interfaces, and dialogue-centered interactive quizzes. We offered a history lesson in over a dozen regional languages and portrayed information in multiple layers of depth and simplicity. Even the media choice of the CD-ROM was flexible, as it could be run as an interactive



CD-ROM on a computer, or a simple audio CD on a CD-player, with each track giving the lesson in a different language.

The other major facet focused on empowering students and teachers by providing multimedia toolsets that encouraged multiple perspectives and enabled them to customize learning materials for their own cultural contexts. In this way, I was able to provide for a wide variety of learning approaches, and to enable others to fill in areas I may have overlooked or underemphasized. Regional USP staff and students completed most of the development work, and the end product was designed so that it could be modified by people with a wider range of technical skills than the usual multimedia program. In this way, I attempted to open authorship of the project to a wider group in the region. We released all of the software as open source, encouraging developers from the cultures within the study to modify and distribute the package as they saw fit.

I also encouraged participants to view the work not as a final product, but as the beginnings of a tool people could use to create their own educational tools for their own purposes. And this is the direction I see most relevant for me, as an outsider researching and developing educational technology in others' cultures: beginning to strip away the confining parameters of technology development to provide general toolsets that can be situated in a variety of contexts without a high degree of technological proficiency. I acknowledge that the tools developed are still only accessible to the confidently computer literate, and that the toolsets themselves were created in a project lead by an outsider. I know that stripping away barriers requires judgment calls, and that simplification involves making a number of decisions for the end user. As I embark on my future work—creating more tangible and less “techy” interfaces to development on computers—I hope at least that my sensitivity to my roles and legacy as an outside researcher will produce technology that can be better situated in the cultures for which it is designed. I hope that this essay will encourage others in my position to consider their own roles with the same rigor.

*This paper was written while I was serving as multimedia specialist at the Media Centre of the University of the South Pacific. The poetry was composed in 2003, while I was reflecting on the research project discussed in this paper.*

CHRISTOPHER ROBBINS has worked as a designer and developer for such organizations as the University of the South Pacific, in Suva, Fiji; the Museum for African Art, in New York City; the Union Bank of Switzerland, in New York City; the Children's Discovery Centre, in London; and a Reuters "dot-com" joint venture, also in London. He studied links between design and society in Japan, and developed cross-cultural instructional materials as a Peace Corps Volunteer in Benin, West Africa, before focusing on educational technology at the Media Centre of the University of the South Pacific. He is currently a graduate student exploring physical interfaces to digital media at the Rhode Island School of Design.

### *References*

Goldsmith, Michael

- 2003 Culture, For and Against: Patterns of "Culturespeak" in New Zealand. *Journal of the Polynesian Society* 112 (3): 280–294.

Hutcheon, Linda

- 1995 Circling the Downspout of Empire. In *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader*, edited by Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin, 130–135. New York: Routledge.

Robbins, Christopher

- 2004 Educational Multimedia for the South Pacific. Research Report, August. Suva: JICA ICT Capacity Building at USP Project.  
([http://www.grographics.com/fiji/AccessUsability-ICTResearch/research-report/Education-Multimedia-for-the-South-Pacific\\_Robbins.pdf](http://www.grographics.com/fiji/AccessUsability-ICTResearch/research-report/Education-Multimedia-for-the-South-Pacific_Robbins.pdf)) [Accessed 11 January 2005]
- 2006a Providing Cultural Context with Educational Multimedia in the South Pacific. *Journal of Educational Technology & Society* 9 (1): 202–212.  
([http://www.ifets.info/journals/9\\_1/17.pdf](http://www.ifets.info/journals/9_1/17.pdf))
- 2006b Developing Culturally Inclusive Educational Multimedia in the South Pacific. In *Information Technology and Indigenous People*, edited by Laurel Evelyn Dyson, Max Hendriks, and Stephen Grant, 65–79. Sydney: University of Technology.

Rowan, Leonie Olivea, Leo Bartlett, and Terry D Evans, editors

- 1997 *Shifting Borders: Globalisation, Localisation and Open and Distance Education*. Geelong, VIC: Deakin University Press.

Smith, Linda Tuhiwai

- 1999 *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples*. London: Zed Books.

Smith, Claire, Heather Burke, and Graeme Ward

- 2000 Globalisation and Indigenous Peoples: Threat or Empowerment? In *Indigenous Cultures in an Interconnected World*, edited by Claire Smith and Graeme Ward, 1–26. Vancouver, British Columbia: UBC Press.

Thaman, Konai Helu

- 1992 Looking Towards the Source: A Consideration of (Cultural) Context in Teacher Education. *Directions* 27 14 (2): 3–13.
- 1997 Considerations of Culture in Distance Education in the Pacific Islands. In Rowan and others 1997, 23–34. Geelong, VIC: Deakin University Press.
- 1999 Of Teachers and Lecturers: Understanding Students' Cultures. *Centrepoin*t, *Newsletter of the Centre for the Enhancement of Learning and Teaching*, November. Suva: University of the South Pacific.
- 2000 Open and Flexible Learning for Whom? Rethinking Distance Education. Keynote address, 14th Annual Conference of the Asian Association of Open Universities, Manila, Philippines, 25–27 October. (<http://www.friends-partners.org/utsumi/gu-l/early-2001/1-31-a.html>) [Accessed 14 January 2004]
- 2002 Towards Cultural Democracy in Pacific Education: An Imperative for the 21st Century. In *Tree of Opportunity: Rethinking Pacific Education*, edited by Frances Pene, 'Ana Taufele'ulungaki, and Cliff Benson, 21–29. Suva: University of the South Pacific Institute of Education.
- 2003 A Conceptual Framework for Analysing Pacific Educational Ideas: The Case of Tonga. In *Educational Ideas from Oceania: Selected Readings*, edited by Konai Helu Thaman, 73–78. Suva: The University of the South Pacific Institute of Education, in association with the UNESCO Chair of Teacher Education and Culture.

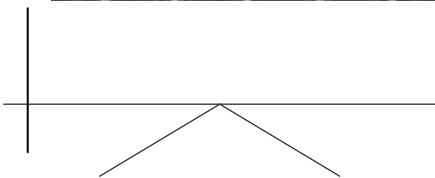
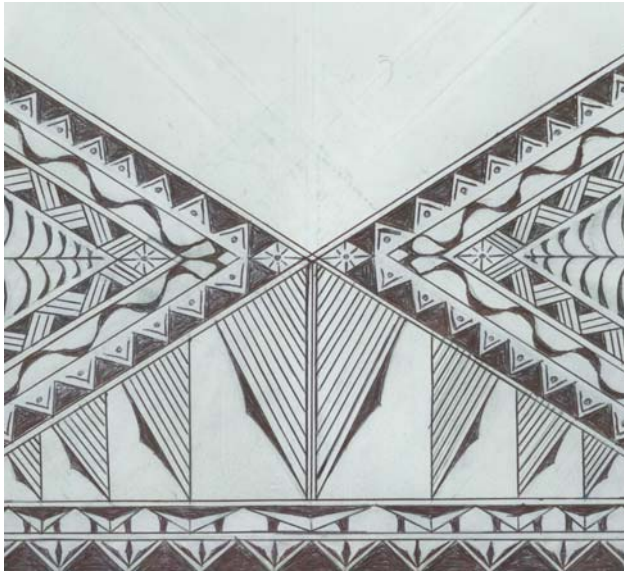
Va'a, Ruby

- 1997 Cultural Accountability in the USP Science Courses at a Distance. In Rowan and others 1997, 83–97. Geelong: Deakin University Press.
- 2000 Appropriate Telecommunication and Learning Technology for Distance Education in the South Pacific. Report of a project funded by New Zealand Official Development Assistance. Suva: Pacific Islands Regional Association for Distance Education, University of the South Pacific.

Wah, Richard

- 1997 Distance Education in the South Pacific: Issues and Contradictions. In Rowan and others 1997, 69–82. Geelong, VIC: Deakin University Press.

## *Oceans and Islands*





*From Islands to Atoll:*

*Relating Reefs of History at Kwajalein*

Greg Dvorak

*1. Atollism*

Islands of starvation, islands of abundance, islands of connectedness: the nearly one hundred flat coral islets that form Kwajalein in the Marshall Islands, the largest atoll on earth, are a gigantic ring on the water, strung together by a dynamic reef. The lagoon it encloses—indeed the entire atoll—is a microcosm of Oceania, a metaphor for the contradictory and interconnected histories of the contemporary world.

I choose Kwajalein to explore the idea of “encounter” not only because it was the site of a major battle of the Pacific War and a place of unfathomable change throughout the twentieth century between Marshall Islanders, Japanese, and Americans; I focus on Kwajalein also because it was my childhood hometown, where I spent the first decade of my life. Because the main island of the atoll is leased to the US Army as a missile-testing base, my early years in American suburbia there provided my first taste of the ways in which huge nations and small localities intersect. Haunted by the ghosts of Japanese soldiers and the lullabies of our Marshallese housekeeper, I knew that this atoll had been home to many others before me, yet I felt linked to those other people through the common idea of home, and through the genealogy of the atoll itself.

Coral colonizes: Polyps voyage in the ocean currents, joining with other coral communities atop subaquatic volcanoes that rise miles from the sea floor to break the surface. Their migrations are based on the flows of the sea, and their settlements are serendipitous. They join with previous settlers, bringing their own histories to the reef, reterritorializing and adapting, forming a complex genealogy that connects islands and forms new ones, reshaping and making sense of the endless blue of ocean.

Like coral, people came to this reef called Kwajalein, riding flows, swells, and serendipity. The people who came long ago in canoes settled on the broadest and most plentiful of these islands, becoming the Ri-Kuwajleen (the Kwajalein people) of the islands now known as the Marshall Islands. Other ocean “currents” such as trade, science

Romanticism, adventure, and Christianity brought other travelers across this reef from Europe and North America, and later from Japan. The tide of militarization and empire washed across the Pacific in the twentieth century and brought other waves of soldiers, civil servants, and engineers like my father.

Kwajalein's reef is encoded with tens of thousands of years of geologic activity in deep time, followed by thousands of years of voyaging, conquest and settlement, wars and disputes. Outrigger canoes, adzes, and mats from other islands close by and further south such as Kiribati or further west such as Kosrae and Chuuk found their way to this reef over time. Layer by layer, new islands formed, while others washed away. In recent centuries, the concrete of Spanish missions has crumbled into the sea with the German cisterns, now overgrown with flamboyant coral—spongy, brittle, or pinnacled. Japanese ships like the *Shōei* or *Asakaze Maru* nestle upside down, entangled with American Budweiser cans.

In conventional histories, we are not taught to think much of the journeys and transformations of individuals. Rather we learn of the victories and losses of nations and the seeming “inevitability” of victimhood and marginalization at the hands of powerful global forces. In their quest to possess the Central Pacific, both Japan and the United States in the last century physically shaped Kwajalein Atoll into a military stepping-stone between the two countries. In the late 1930s, Japanese battalions of *setsuei-butai* construction workers,<sup>1</sup> mostly Korean laborers and Marshallese (Fukushige 1987, 39), used dynamite to break enormous holes in the reef around the main islets of Kwajalein. These reef rocks were used to build seawalls, buildings, and the first runway, still the main island's most prominent feature. Beginning in the 1950s, earth was moved and shifted again by US forces, who blasted even larger holes in the reef, dredged away entire sacred coral heads,<sup>2</sup> and expanded the contours of different islands.

This traumatic reshaping of the reef and rewriting of land corresponds to the ways in which collective American war memories have oversimplified the atoll's complexity. The history of the US invasion and “liberation” from Japanese forces in 1944 has become the official story of what “really” happened. It is a story that effectively inscribes Kwajalein as a “perpetual battlefield” (Carucci 1989, 73), later justifying the extensive

testing of unprecedented nuclear weaponry and the eventual present-day use of Kwajalein Island for military purposes.

In contrast to the flows of real human bodies in real physical space, these waves of national discourse have a way of obscuring the true coral reef-like connections between people and place. The American victory narrative articulates Kwajalein with the United States and memorializes the land as intrinsically American, simultaneously obscuring the stories of Marshall Islanders, Japanese, and Koreans, as well as other Islanders and nonmilitary Americans. As Vicente Diaz has described in the context of Guam (2001), the compelling story of “liberation” has done more to reinforce US hegemony than anything else.

What I would like to propose, however, is that there is another history that settles and grows solid like coral does within the reef of an atoll. Beyond the glorious narratives of nation lie the stories of people who find themselves linked to one another implicitly through place and deal with those consequences in different ways. Like the submerged reefs between islands, their connections are not always visible, but they exist nonetheless.

The “atollistic” worldview I am imagining here is an expansion of Epeli Hau’ofa’s treatise, “Our Sea of Islands” (1993), a manifesto that stresses the flows between Islanders via the connectivity of the sea itself, and that points out the resourcefulness of inter-Oceanic networks of communication, culture, and exchange linking islands and also spanning the world through diaspora. Katerina Teaiwa has since emphasized the importance of genealogies and the ways in which all Islanders are deeply united across Oceania through traceable ties that transcend national and colonial boundaries (2005).

“Atollism” not only accounts for the flows and interconnections between Islanders, in the literal sense, but also takes into consideration the broader relationships of people to place, and the transformations and linkages that happen through migration and settlement. While Europeans and Asians may have settled in Oceania in recent centuries for any number of reasons, it is significant that they have indeed started new lives in these places, initiated their own relationships to the local context, and symbolically participated, like coral, in the creation of the reef. Many settlers have found a sense of home in Oceania, which they carry with them even if they return to their place of origin.



Thus it is largely through the mediation of these outsiders that places like Kwajalein have been intertwined into the histories of other localities—through copra traders to Hanover, Germany; through navy sailors to Aichi, Japan; or through missile testers to Huntsville, Alabama.

I do not write this to condone colonialism, by any means. Nor do I intend to disregard the immense power discrepancies that have led to the abuse and dislocation of people from their own land. Rather, in imagining the bigger atoll, I am attempting instead to draw attention to the actual participants in the drama of history and to show how they are personally implicated and involved in the larger network of the reef, which is often at odds with the mandates of their “mission.” Many Japanese or German traders married into local families and stayed in the Marshall Islands in the early 1900s; many Japanese families come back again and again to mourn the loss of fallen soldiers; many American children who grew up on Kwajalein continue to return and reconnect with “home.”

In my own return to the Marshall Islands to conduct doctoral research, I was challenged by the words of the *Iroojlaplap* (paramount chief) of Kwajalein. When I introduced myself to him and told him that although I had grown up on Kwajalein and felt like it was my home, I knew it was not really my home and I was not indigenous, he stopped me in mid-sentence, saying, “If you love Kwajalein and you feel like that place is your home, and you spent your childhood here, then I say it is your home and you do belong here. These islands don’t belong to anyone. We belong to them. . . . You’ve got a piece of Kwajalein in you, and that’s why you keep coming back. You’ve got to do something for this place.”<sup>3</sup> Ever since this invitation to belong to the atoll, I have begun to see myself less as an estranged colonizer than as someone who has a real responsibility and role in its history.

Kwajalein’s name was likely adapted from a European mispronunciation of *rukjanleen*, “the people who gather or harvest the fruits of the place known as Kwajalein” (Carucci 1997, 49). The far western edge of Kwajalein islet was home to a legendary *utilomar* flowering tree that bore precious flowers,<sup>4</sup> and the sea around that area was the source of enough flying fish to feed all of the Marshall Islands (Langkio and Sam 2005). It was the dream of many to come and pluck these flowers, and this explains why the atoll was so popular with Spanish, Germans, Japanese, and Americans. “Everyone wants

to get a piece of Kwajalein,” said Ato Langkio and Kirong Sam, both respected Kwajalein Atoll elders who are very knowledgeable about old stories and the prewar period; “the whole world is being blessed—because Kwajalein gives the world peace” (Langkio and Sam 2005).

It is this inclusive and rather optimistic definition of encounter—the genealogy of coral and its many reefs—on which I would like to meditate, to dislocate the ongoing conversation about indigenous/nonindigenous and the false binary this creates. I am writing here not to delineate who is indigenous and who is a colonizer, but rather to consider the possibility that there is a true difference between actual people and the “currents” on which they journey, and that, regardless of how cruel, contradictory, or accidental, these migrations have sedimented layer on layer and formed real meanings, emplaced and embodied.

The late Hokari Minoru, in his groundbreaking book *Radical Oral History* (2004), contemplated the possibility of a cross-cultural history that does not involve nationalistic state histories vis-à-vis “indigenous peoples,” but rather one that takes into consideration the mutuality and interconnectedness of the conversations happening between groups of people at the local level. In his work with the Gujirindi people of Northern Territory Australia, Hokari told a history in which he personally participated by linking the space and time of local Japan to that of the local Australian outback. “Local history is a fragment which supposes its implicit all-ness. This fragment gestures toward the complexity and multiplicity of everything without threatening that totality itself” (Hokari 2004, 215).<sup>5</sup>

Like Hokari, in the model of the atoll I imagine integrity, rather than isolation and irrelevance, in the local. The orality of personal memory, indeed “oral history,” is one in which the speaker “relates” seemingly disparate ideas together. Relating, articulating, and narrating are always about simultaneously telling and linking. Yet there is a big difference between the kinds of articulations made locally and the meta-narratives deployed by nations in order to justify power and conquest. As in Kwajalein, too often such local histories, and their fragmentary but metonymic “all-ness” (as suggested by Hokari), are marginalized by the violence of colonial and state histories that privilege the

convenient collective memories of Empire over the perceived messiness of local stories and individual memories.

Those who have eaten the fruits of the Kwajalein tree are in some way transformed by the experience and linked together through the common heritage of home and place. In the stories that follow I explore the lives of a few people for whom Kwajalein is in some way home. In their own relating of their own experiences, it will become clear just how much each person belongs to the same continuum and how they are in fact related to one another despite the tensions and contradictions of US hegemonic power.



*Photo 1. Young Ebeye residents swim at low tide with the radars of Kwajalein across the reef in the background. Photo by Greg Dvorak.*

## *2. Raymond*

He sits patiently on a bench beside the dock security checkpoint on the islet of Kwajalein, his arms folded. Beside him is a five-gallon, yellow plastic water cooler.

“I am waiting for my wife, like always,” he explains. “She works as a maid here, and so she gets off work an hour after I do. I know she’s tired, so I like to help her carry all our stuff back home.” He pauses and waits silently for a gym-pumped Kwajalein policeman in a white polo shirt, black shorts, and black sneakers to stroll past us.

“They don’t let us stay on this island any later than an hour after work anymore. They say it’s for security reasons,” he says under his breath. “But for some reason, they let us on the island sometimes two, three hours before work, while it’s still dark out and all the Americans on this island are still sleeping. I don’t understand. . . . They treat us Marshallese like terrorists in our own country, even when Marshallese are fighting in the US Army in Iraq.”<sup>6</sup> Raymond chuckles dryly, pretending it’s funny, and looks at his watch.

“Well, it looks like she’s late today, and I am gonna get in trouble if I wait out here any longer,” he says, hoisting up a large bag of ice cubes over his shoulder and pointing to the cooler beside him. “Can you carry this?” he asks. “Let’s go through security and wait on the outside of the dock.”

The dock security checkpoint on Kwajalein is not quite like it used to be when I was a little boy growing up here in the 1970s. That was before the Marshallese landowners of Kwajalein Atoll began their peaceful demonstrations for fair compensation for their land (Johnson 1982). Now, as we walk through the checkpoint, our badges are inspected and our bags are run through an x-ray machine and tested for explosives. One of the guards takes my badge until I return to Kwajalein, and says with a wink, “Have a great time on Ebeye, dude.” Two police dogs sniff angrily at our legs. Raymond jokes to me, “You’d better not be trying to feed those dogs any T-bone steaks from your bag, alright? You know the police will confiscate them!” I don’t have any food in my bags, but he is not joking about the confiscations: The base at Kwajalein forbids the transfer of most retail food items beyond its borders. More specifically, the authorities are constantly trying to prevent the American community’s subsidized fresh food from being smuggled to Ebeye and other Marshallese communities. Despite the fact that, as in any small town, most people know each other on a first-name basis, minor infractions are taken very seriously.

“First it was the food, and now the water,” says Raymond. “Our water desalinization plant over on Ebeye keeps breaking down, and so no one wants to drink that salty stuff. It makes you sick. The Marshallese government and the Kwajalein Atoll landowners can’t agree on anything and so we end up with bad water and sometimes no power, and then the base doesn’t even let us drink their water. They used to let anyone

come and fill up a cooler with water, but then they put the tap on the inside of the fence to make sure only badged workers get to drink it. That's why there are all these kids gathered around here at the dock—they're hoping someone will give them drinkable water to take back to their families who don't have jobs here." All around us in the ferry waiting area are teenage boys, watching the basketball game that flickers on the wall-mounted TV sets. They all carry empty buckets, coolers, and plastic bottles, eager to catch the eye of a Marshallese badged worker who can sneak back through security to fill up their tanks with a day's supply of water.

"It's sad to see those water boys" he sighs, "but we're not supposed to fill up water for them. Some of us do, but you can get in trouble. Yesterday there was a guy in front of me who had gone back out to fill up one kid's bucket, and when he came back through security the policewoman there recognized him and told him to dump it all out or get fined. I thought to myself, if she's going to make him dump out all that precious water in the first place, what's the point?"

Soon Lora, Raymond's wife, comes through the metal detector and joins us, just in time to catch the six o'clock boat. She holds a huge plastic bag full of clean laundry that she did while housekeeping for an American family on Kwajalein. Together the three of us hop on the ferry as it pushes away from the harbor.

The ferry that runs the short distance between Kwajalein and Ebeye is really a military landing craft, reequipped with long benches inside and a canvas canopy to keep dry. Workers—everyone from supermarket clerks to mechanics, airport baggage handlers to nannies—cram the benches and the stairwell, talking story, listening to music through headphones, watching the sun set on the horizon. Scattered among them are some of the Marshallese schoolchildren chosen to study with the Americans at Kwajalein, who sit together with their bulging book bags and compare answers to their math homework. In stark contrast to these children, the water boys perch proudly on the upper deck with their freshly filled tanks, leaning into the wind.

Raymond gestures to the horizon. "My island's out there. You can almost see it from here, on the West Reef. We own that whole island. It's a part of this atoll, just one of the small islands, but it's in the Mid-Atoll Corridor, where the missiles come down. So back in the 1950s, when I was a small boy, the US made us leave our islands and come to

Ebeye. They even promised us all jobs on Kwajalein to make us go. It never really happened that way, and still we can't go back to live there.

"Ooh, but it was a good island, really nice, really small. There were plenty of families there, but we were like one big family, so we used to all pray together and eat in the same cookhouse and tell stories until late at night. It was so quiet and nice. You could catch coconut crabs everywhere, and giant clams out on the reef, and eat breadfruit and pandanus. Imagine how that was—we had all the food we ever wanted. So friendly, so safe. Now I see these kids walking around Ebeye asking for handouts. They don't even know how to climb a coconut tree."

On Ebeye, Raymond and his wife hail a taxi, a red pickup truck with the word "Yokwe"—Love—written on its rear window. We all jump in the back with the cooler, laundry, and bag of ice cubes. "The kids really like it when we bring these back from Kwaj," he says. "They put it in their cola."

The pickup truck rumbles through the crowded streets of Ebeye at twilight. Children run in all directions, some playfully throwing rocks as we roll by. We pass the waste-treatment plant and approach the dump. The air is pungent with the smell of car exhaust and an occasional waft of sewage. "You're lucky—today the wind is blowing in the other direction," Raymond points out, and Lora covers her mouth as she laughs.

We walk through rows and rows of dilapidated plywood bungalows, interspersed with aluminum trailer houses with broken windows and doors falling off hinges—recycled housing from the US base. Nearby, smoke billows out of the mounds of trash in the landfill area. People call this area of Ebeye "Dumptown." Raymond unlocks a heavy padlock on a flimsy door and jiggles the door open. "Home sweet home," he says, as we enter a hot, dimly lit room with no windows. This, he explains, is emergency housing erected by FEMA in the 1980s after a major typhoon devastated the island. Raymond's family still lives there. Inside, the walls are adorned with children's artwork, an embroidered illustration of Jesus and the Last Supper, family photographs, and other memorabilia.



Photo 2. Plywood housing along the lagoon at Ebeye. Photo by Greg Dvorak.

“Actually, no *ribelle* has ever come in here. You’re the first one. Those Americans don’t come over to Ebeye people’s houses most of the time, you know,” Raymond tells me.

Lora reclines on their bed after a long day of work, and Raymond massages his wife’s tired feet. Two of their sons come in from outside and sit quietly beside me as their father talks.

On the wall is a tattered, color copy of a sepia photograph of several Japanese men in white suits. One man holds a baby.

“My wife’s grandfather, he was Japanese, a businessman. That makes her a quarter Japanese. *Kon-nichiwa!*” he salutes and bows dutifully to her with a grimace on his face.

Lora interjects, “I heard he was a really nice man. Back in those days, my parents told me when Japanese were in the Marshall Islands, people got along with each other. They traded things with each other, they talked each other’s languages. They had kids together.”

“It’s kinda like now, but really different. Americans are welcome here, and we like them and have lots of friends,” Raymond nods at me, “and we’re good neighbors, but it’s not the same. It’s like they don’t realize how we’re all part of the same place. There was a big war here, and horrible things happen in wars, but a lot of people around here also don’t think the Americans really set us free. They just came and did all this testing and put the radiation here. And maybe we’re an independent country now, but oh, not Kwajalein. We do all the work for the Americans on Kwajalein, and we just make them look good every day. Like good hosts, we give them their space and they are welcome—all we ask is they respect us, and our right to belong here, too.

“One thing I can say is I never understand why the Americans and the Japanese and all these people wanted Kwajalein so much,” he jokes. “These islands are just low and flat—who would want to come live here? They’re low and simple like us Marshallese people.” He smiles skeptically and Lora slaps him on the back—“*Wuk-kuk!*” she laughs, “Raymond’s so simple that he can’t keep his mouth shut!”

“I love Kwajalein Atoll so much,” Raymond continues. “This place is my home, my God-given place. One of these days I’m gonna go back to my small island. And if the US doesn’t give us a better land payment deal by 2016, some of the landowners here say we should go back there for sure. But even then, is our government gonna fix Ebeye? Anyway, I don’t care about my job on Kwajalein anymore—I just care about my people.

“Yeah, of course I’m gonna be fine if I go back to my small island, and those other Marshallese from other places, they can go back to theirs. I know how to live out there. It was bound to happen some day. I’m gonna teach my sons how to make their own canoes, how to hunt for reef fish. We’ll go home for once and for all,” he announces proudly, crossing his arms. The boys giggle and nod as their father talks, with smirks of disbelief on their faces. Raymond wads up a piece of notepaper and hits his eldest son in the shoulder—“I’m serious!” He turns to me and smiles widely, “and you’re gonna be welcome, like always!”

### 3. *Dan*

I ride back around ten o’clock, the monotonous drone of the military ferry’s engines and the nauseating stench of diesel choking out the fresh, gentle breezes of a full-moon



evening. There are almost no other passengers on board, except for a middle-aged Marshallese woman stretched out on a bench fanning herself and a white man with a baseball cap, tipsy from his evening escapades on Ebeye. When we reach Kwaj, the woman slouches down on a bench outside the security checkpoint, perhaps to wait for the start of a midnight work shift. The American man stumbles back into the base, and I follow him. The night guard returns our badges to us as we walk onto the quiet island.

Unlike Ebeye, Kwaj is completely quiet, except for the hum of all the air-conditioning and the distant thundering of the waves on the ocean side. Most people are asleep by now, but on my way back to where I am staying, I see a group of people waving at me. They are seated in lounge chairs in someone's backyard, with tiki torches, a piñata strung between two palm trees, and pink flamingoes planted in the ground around them. Duran Duran's "Ordinary World" plays in the background from an iPod. "Wanna margarita?" my friend Lisa calls out.

It is a Cinco de Mayo party, hence the Mexican theme. I join a circle of single men and women in their thirties, most of whom are strangers to me, and it is as if I have just stepped into America. They are talking about the latest local basketball scores, what's on TV, an upcoming honeymoon to Portugal, how the daily boat to the mission control room on Meck Island (in the Ralik Chain of Kwajalein Atoll) is way too early. One man in an Army T-shirt is boasting about how he's finally leaving "the rock" because of a disagreement with his boss—"Can't wait to get off this island!" The others in the group don't believe him: "You know you'll be back—no one stays away from this place for long!"

Lisa passes me my drink and asks, "What's it like on Ebeye this time of night? I've never been there after dark—hell, I've almost never even been there during the day!"

A slightly older bachelor with a barbell moustache and a frayed red T-shirt interrupts her and gives me a firm handshake that hurts. "Hi, I'm Dan," he says as he seats himself beside me. After I explain who I am, he clinks his Corona against my glass and says in a heavy drawl, "No kiddin'—you're a Kwaj Kid, just like me!"

Squinting toward the moonlit lagoon, he takes a deep breath and says, "Bet you love this place, don'tcha? I mean, that water, the sound of these palm fronds swishing

around up above us. And you know that's not all of it, though." He turns away from the crowd and softens his voice.

"Kwaj is a smell, right? You know what I mean? It's a smell that gets under your skin and then you can never forget it. It's like this perfume that puts you to bed at night. It's this 'alone' kinda thing, just between you and the island. You feel it in your bones. And so many of these guys who come out here to Kwaj, they don't get it. They just come and go. Have little parties like this one, talk about the States all the time. But if you grow up here and you live here for a long time, and you really love these islands—you feel connected to it and you know you belong here. It's something you can't describe in words. I feel like I have to protect this place, not for America but for the island itself. It's so hard to explain, but if you could bottle up this smell somehow and you could tell all those people out there what it's about, they'd understand."

He goes silent for a moment and squints again toward the horizon, out at the flashing radar lights at the other end of the island. "You know something, it'd be a really horrible thing if I couldn't ever come back here again and again like I do. With the military and all that, it's just strange how we came out here in the first place, about all those Japanese people who died out here. I think of what happened every time I go down to one of those Japanese ships when I scuba dive. And it's weird how when I was a kid the kids of the chief from Ebeye would come over to my house and eat sandwiches with us for lunch. But that's Kwaj. For good or for bad, this place is my home, and I share it with these other people, and I don't know what it is, but it's that feeling I get, like the island needs me here or something.

"Sometimes," Dan continues, "you know it's like I just hate what America's doing here, what *I'm* doing here. I mean I do this weird job where I go out on a ship and make sure no one's on those little islands in the atoll when they do the missile tests. Why do we have to do those tests in the first place? And I understand it if Marshallese people don't want us here anymore with the lease expiring in 2016. We don't pay them enough money, don't pay them enough respect. We don't even let them on their own island half the time. And even then, a lot of people want the Americans to stay. But as a Kwaj Kid, I gotta be out here, gotta do my part so no one else comes and messes it up. I love this place and so I wanna take care of it somehow. I feel like that's my real job."



*Photo 3. Marshallese cemetery, overshadowed by a US Army radar installation, Kwajalein Atoll.  
Photo by Greg Dvorak.*

#### *4. Yukiko*

It is mid-morning and the Kwajalein sunshine beats down brightly, as a group of twenty elderly Japanese gather around the memorial. It is labeled “Japanese Cemetery”; but the remains of the nearly 7,000 Japanese soldiers and sailors who died in the Battle of Kwajalein are in fact buried in various locations throughout the island and at numerous sites throughout the atoll, as well as in the sunken ships at the bottom of the lagoon. Only some of the remains have been repatriated to Japan.<sup>7</sup> For the survivors of these men, the whole island is a cemetery.

The memorial is behind the Kwajalein Photo Lab out at the end of the runway, the site where American forces made their amphibious invasion of the island during the Pacific War, across the reef from the neighboring island of Enebuj (Marshall 2001). It faces “Mount Olympus,” a complex of white radar domes and antennas used for tracking missiles. In 1965, the Japan Marshalls-Gilberts Bereavement Association proposed this memorial as a place to commemorate the souls of the war dead, where people could come

to mourn their lost loved ones. However, the cold war climate of secrecy and security at the time forbade the Japanese mourners to grieve on Kwajalein. The group wanted so badly to touch the earth where their spouses, brothers, and fathers eternally slept that they compromised by making a request for a hundred kilograms of coral sand to be shipped to Japan, and this request was granted. Not until the mid-1970s was the group granted access to the base, and even then it was only allowed a brief one-hour visit.<sup>8</sup>

The group that visits Kwajalein today has been granted three days of access to the atoll, under new policies that began five years ago.<sup>9</sup> Before their ceremony, the bereaved families tidy up the memorial, pulling weeds and sweeping off the dust. They hang large yellow paper lanterns from the gate, arrange a spread of Japanese confections, sake, beer, and family photographs on the altar, and light incense. One by one, the mourners quietly approach the shrine, bowing and then reading out passionate letters to the dead soldiers on behalf of their families back in Japan. The letters tell of new children and family transitions, but the mourners also compare their experiences of Kwajalein to what it must have been like during the war. Michio says to his departed father, “To imagine that here on this plentiful island, rich with flowers and trees, there was a battle so intense that only one coconut tree was left standing, I mourn for how much suffering you must have endured.”

Above the memorial’s red torii shrine gate, two white birds dance in the sunlight. One of the women taps the Marshallese bus driver on the shoulder and asks him in English what kind of bird that is. He replies, “It’s a *kear*, the kind of bird that helps you find your way home when you are lost at sea.”

Standing beside the sea an hour later, Yukiko, a youthful woman in her late sixties with eyes swollen from grief, takes out a photograph from her purse and shows it to me. It is of a man in a white navy uniform. His skin is darkly tanned, and his eyes stare into the camera with a faint expression of loneliness. His pants are spattered with specks of dark paint. In the background are vines, like the shrubbery along the reef of Kwajalein. “That’s him,” she says, with tears brimming up. “Before he was drafted into the navy he worked for a paper mill. His name was Kametaro, but everyone called him Kame-chan for short. He was so popular in our town, always took care of people.” She strokes her father’s face in the photo lovingly and smiles.



*Photo 4. Photo of Suzuki Kametaro, taken on Kwajalein c. 1943.  
Photographer unknown, courtesy of Suzuki Yukiko.*

“He used to ride me down to the beach on the handlebars of his bicycle when I was a little girl. He loved the ocean and said he’d swim all the way back to Japan if his boat ever sank. When we went to drop him off at Yokosuka Harbor in 1941, we went there with my mother, my sister, and our dog Meri. I was just six years old. My family just stood there quietly and watched him sail away.” She dabs her eyes with a handkerchief and points to the north. “They tell me his ship sank somewhere right over . . . there.”

She whispers in a gentle, quiet voice, “The first time I came here, I felt something so warm and safe enveloping me. I felt the warm breeze on my cheeks, the sunshine. The air smelled so sweet. I looked out to the open ocean and saw those waves, tasted the salt

on my lips. It felt so familiar, so comforting, like I had been here before even though I hadn't. It felt like my hometown, my *furusato*. I mean, it is my home—I really feel that way, and I've never even lived here."

### 5. *Encounters*

In an atoll, one can always see across the lagoon to other islands, whether or not one ever makes the crossing to actually set foot there. The presence of "others" is always felt, and so is the connection to them. It is probably for this reason that so many Marshallese legends honor the differences and contradictions between islands: Although land is precious and limited, the fact that each island is unique but part of a larger whole makes space for multiplicity and variation. Just as significantly, most Marshall Islanders have multiple family and clan affiliations between islands, all throughout the Marshall Islands, from different islands within atolls and between atolls. In this kind of paradigm, it is easier to imagine a heritage that appreciates multilocality while simultaneously appreciating the "big picture."

These three diverse narratives from my recent fieldwork reveal the stark contradictions of life and layers of history that coexist in Kwajalein Atoll, but Raymond and Lora, Dan, and Yukiko are all tied together by their common desire to be home. While each of these histories—of the American community of Kwajalein, Marshallese landowners and laborers, and bereaved survivors of Japanese war dead—represents a radically different perspective, and each individual lives in a vastly different world or "island," in reality these histories are interdependent. They crisscross together and form an atoll, like a vast and complex family. Sixty years after the war, there is now space to see beyond and between the battles waged here to begin a meaningful process of reconciliation.

Yet there are many barriers that make this "atollism" challenging. For the roughly 2,000–3,000 (estimates fluctuate) American civilians who work for defense contractors and their families, life is "Almost Heaven," as Kwajalein T-shirts sold in the 1970s attested. But it is impossible for Kwajalein Marshallese landowners and other residents to return home or move freely through their atoll, and unthinkable for Americans and Japanese without proper permission to do the same. In the absence of a larger "atoll



consciousness,” the attitude of “that’s just the way it is” tends to prevail. Despite their awareness of the injustices that happen daily in Kwajalein, many Americans, Japanese visitors, and Marshallese elites do not venture to take action that would improve the situation.



*Photo 5. American Independence Day (Fourth of July) celebrations on Kwajalein. Photo by Greg Dvorak.*

Local Kwajalein Marshallese exasperation has intensified in recent years. The Compact of Free Association signed in 2003 between the United States and the Republic of the Marshall Islands includes a Military Use and Operations Agreement that grants the United States strategic access to Kwajalein until 2066, with an option to renew until 2086. The Kwajalein Negotiation Committee, comprising a number of *irooj* (chiefs), *alab* (clan heads), and senior *rijerbal* (workers) who have claims to the land, argue that their

government made this agreement behind their backs, and have refused to sign the new Land Use Agreement, which they believe offers far too little compensation for the future. As the Marshall Islands government is forbidden to own land, these private landowners insist that if they are not offered a new land use agreement before the current one expires in 2016, the United States will have to leave. While the United States consistently emphasizes its “internationally binding agreement” with the Marshall Islands government, this contingent of atoll landowners are adamant in their claims (*Marshall Islands Journal* 2005).

While the negotiation committee’s position is disputed by many Marshallese residents of Ebeye, many who have land rights in the atoll, this standoff between the Marshall Islands government and Kwajalein is delaying the release of much-needed funds for the development and maintenance of Ebeye and other islands. There tends to be a consensus among most Marshallese residents of Kwajalein Atoll, however, that even though more money is needed, a pullout of the US military would be catastrophic.

The failure to see the genealogical reef and the responsibilities inherent in that relationship is a major factor that contributes to these problems. At low tide, Ebeye and Kwajalein islets are so connected that one can easily walk the three miles of reef between them; yet they are so separated by discourses of development, colonialism, and security that they might as well be worlds apart. All too often, American narratives emphasize the dependency of Islanders on the United States, without acknowledging the interdependency that atoll-dwellers know so intimately. Japanese narratives, meanwhile, elide the prewar history of colonial integration and tend to justify a lack of interest by the Japanese government in supporting the region economically.

However, there is still space to explore the possibility of a shared heritage that not only invites island inhabitants—at Kwajalein and throughout Oceania—to recognize their interconnected “atollness,” but also challenges larger nations like Japan and the United States to engage on equal terms with “small” island states. After all, coral grows back, bringing new generations of possibility to grow slowly on the concrete, the landfill, the causeway, the beer bottles. It breaks through the cracks, bridging the impasses, forming new reefs, and starting all over again.



*This article is based on my multi-sited ethnographic research in Kwajalein Atoll, other Marshall Islands, and Japan in 2004–2005. I have chosen to protect the identities of the “protagonists” of these short scenarios and have thus changed identifying details in certain cases, but these stories are based on actual interviews and quotes.*

*I would like to acknowledge the generous funding of the Australian National University and the Japan Society for the Promotion of Science for making this research possible. I would also like to thank the traditional leaders of Kwajalein Atoll for their blessings, the Marshallese Cultural Center and the Host Nations Office of US Army Kwajalein Atoll, and the residents of both Ebeye and Kwajalein for their enormous contributions. I am also indebted to the openness of the Japan Marshall Islands War-Bereaved Families Association in Tokyo in sharing their stories with me. This article is dedicated to the memory of Anjain Rowa, 1955–2006.*

GREG DVORAK was born in Philadelphia but spent many of his formative years growing up in Kwajalein Atoll, Marshall Islands. Educated in both the United States and Japan, he studied at Waseda University in Tokyo and earned his BA in Asian studies (Japanese literature) and psychology from Rutgers College in 1996. After living in Japan for nearly ten years and working for the Japanese government and for an advertising firm, he went to the University of Hawai'i, where he obtained his MA in Pacific Islands studies with a certificate in international cultural studies in 2004. Having completed research in Australia, the Marshall Islands, and Japan (where he was based at Tokyo University on a fellowship from the Japan Society for the Promotion of Science), he is currently making a documentary film and writing his doctoral dissertation in interdisciplinary cross-cultural research (history and anthropology) at the Australian National University. His research is supported in part by Oceanic Encounters, an Australian Research Council-funded initiative at the ANU Gender Relations Centre, exploring themes of gender, sexuality, and culture in Oceania.

### *Notes*

1. *Setsuei-butai* (literally, “construction corps”) were units of (usually paid) civilian contract laborers who worked for the Japanese military to build fortifications, barracks, and facilities to accommodate the massive increase in Japanese troops in the early 1940s. They were sometimes referred to as *ninpu*, or “laborers.” Depending on the location, these units consisted of men recruited from rural Japan, Okinawa, and Korea who had often been deemed unsuitable for combat. In Kwajalein Atoll and other sites, Marshallese men also worked with these groups. In some cases (such as in Wotje Atoll), units consisted of inmates from Japanese prisons.

2. Conversations with US Army Kwajalein Atoll archaeologist Leslie Mead, Kwajalein, 3 April 2005, and Ato Langkio, Ebeye, 28 March 2005.
3. Conversation with Imata Kabua, Majuro, 14 March 2005.
4. A night-blooming small white flower of the heliotrope family, the *utilomar* releases a haunting fragrance like jasmine and ylang-ylang but much more delicate. It is regarded as the most precious Marshallese flower for making leis and ceremonial crowns.
5. This is my translation from the original Japanese version of *Radical Oral History* (2004), an English version of which is forthcoming.
6. Being “treated like terrorists” is a common analogy drawn by many Marshallese workers and leaders in Kwajalein Atoll, seen in several of the letters to the editor of the *Marshall Islands Journal* between January and June 2005.
7. Conversation with Leslie Mead, Kwajalein, 3 April 2005.
8. Conversation with Satake Esu, Kwajalein, 6 October 2005. Satake Esu is the widow of a Japanese military pilot who was stationed in Kwajalein Atoll during the war; she is one of the oldest members of the Japanese Bereaved Families Association.
9. Conversation with Tamura Ryōichi, Tokyo, 23 January 2005.

### References

Carucci, Laurence M

- 1989 The Source of the Force in Marshallese Cosmology. In *The Pacific Theater: Island Representations of World War II*, edited by Geoffrey White and Lamont Lindstrom, 73–96. Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Press.
- 1997 In Anxious Anticipation of Kuwajleen’s Uneven Fruits: A Cultural History of the Significant Locations and Important Resources of Kuwajleen Atoll. With translation by Alfred Capelle. Manuscript prepared for United States Army Space and Strategic Defense Command, Huntsville, Alabama.

Diaz, Vicente M

- 2001 Deliberating “Liberation Day”: Identity, History, Memory, and War in Guam. In *Perilous Memories: The Asia-Pacific War(s)*, edited by Takashi Fujitani, Geoffrey M White, and Lisa Yoneyama, 155–179. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

Fukushige, Hiroshi

- 1987 Gyokusai no Shimajima. *Maru*, vol. 6. Tokyo: Shiobosho.

Hau`ofa, Epeli

- 1993 Our Sea of Islands. In *A New Oceania: Rediscovering Our Sea of Islands*, edited by Eric Waddell, Vijay Naidu, and Epeli Hau`ofa, 2–16. Suva: School of Social and Economic Development, University of the South Pacific, in association with Beake House.

Hokari, Minoru

2004 *Radical Oral History*. Tokyo: Ochanomizu Shobō.

Johnson, Giff

1982 Atoll Protesters “Occupy” Missile Sites. *National Catholic Reporter*. 27 August.

Langkio, Ato, and Kirong Sam

2005 Kwajalein in Japanese Times. Lecture with Greg Dvorak at Marshallese Cultural Center, Kwajalein, Marshall Islands, 12 May.

*Marshall Islands Journal*

2005 Iroij Imata: US Money Move Illegal. *Marshall Islands Journal*, 14 October.

Marshall, Samuel L A

2001 *Island Victory: The Battle of Kwajalein Atoll*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press.

Teaiwa, Katerina Martina

2005 Between Our Islands. Lecture at the University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa /East-West Center, 2 March.

*Between The Hui and Da Hui Inc.:  
Incorporating N-oceans of Native Hawaiian Resistance  
in Oceanic Cultural Studies*

Kali Fermantez

INTRODUCTION

When eighteen-year-old Makua Rothman dropped into a massive wave at Pe`ahi, the surf break also known as “Jaws,” he successfully rode the largest wave in the world, which won him the 2003 Billabong XXL Global Big Wave Award.<sup>1</sup> As he had grown up on the North Shore of O`ahu as the son of Eddie Rothman, co-founder of Da Hui Inc.,<sup>2</sup> the younger Rothman’s feat was symbolic of the surf company’s development from its local origins to a rise and expansion riding the global waves of the surfing industry. As a spin-off of the grassroots organization Hui o He`e Nalu, which extends Native Hawaiian resistance into ocean space, Da Hui Inc. owes much of its success to its incorporation of and literal capitalization on the ideas of the original club.

In this paper, I examine the entities of Hui o He`e Nalu and Da Hui Inc. as indigenous articulations, leashed not only to each other, but also to local and global forces. This study provides an example of the way in which Oceanic cultural studies can engage with issues of indigeneity. I first situate my research in the Pacific by arguing for an indigenous accent on cultural studies in Oceania in general, and Hawai`i in particular. I then discuss how Native Hawaiian resistance found expression in Hui o He`e Nalu, and I consider their signature black shorts as a cultural text that can be read. The implications of the club’s entanglement with localism is then explored, followed by an examination of the way indigenous resistance has been incorporated into the increasingly global surfing industry by Da Hui. I conclude by considering what is at stake for Native Hawaiians in the ways their resistance is incorporated at both local and global scales.

# WAVES OF CULTURAL STUDIES IN OCEANIA

As Pacific scholars ride the waves of cultural studies that increasingly traverse Oceania, they will have to address questions of indigeneity. Despite the seemingly endless sea of possibilities, mainstream cultural studies has been reluctant to engage with indigenous issues (Shapiro and others 2002; Diaz and Kauanui 2001). This neglect surely results from the linkage of the multiple discourses of indigeneity to notions of “culture, community, shared experience, and national identity,” the elements that Stuart Hall referred to as “shoals and currents” in the “confusing and dangerous waters” of the late-modern world (1993, 352–353). In the Pacific, these “dangerous waters” are in part made up of the salt water that links the identities of the island peoples in the space that is Oceania:

We sweat and cry salt water, so we know  
that the ocean is really in our blood.  
(Teresia Teaiwa, quoted by Epeli Hau'ofa, “The Ocean in Us”)

Drawing on the collective heredity of what Epeli Hau'ofa has called an expansive “sea of islands,” indigenous Pacific scholars can confront this neglect by the cultural studies mainstream:

Oceania is vast, Oceania is expanding, Oceania is hospitable and generous, Oceania is humanity rising from the depths of brine and regions of fire deeper still, Oceania is us. We are the sea, we are the ocean, we must wake up to this ancient truth and together use it to overturn all hegemonic views that aim ultimately to confine us again, physically and psychologically, in the tiny spaces which we have resisted accepting as our sole appointed places, and from which we have recently liberated ourselves. We must not allow anyone to belittle us again, and take away our freedom. (Hau'ofa 1993, 16)

This re-visioned Pacific provides a space and context for the idea that Islanders are rooted in and routed through island-scapes and seascapes (Diaz and Kauanui 2001). Thus, while Teaiwa has suggested that the *routed* side of the dialectic—which includes migration, diaspora, and exile—is privileged by cultural studies (2001), I argue that an engagement with indigenous *roots* is unavoidable when considering Oceanic cultural studies.

The inter-, extra-, and anti-disciplinary field that is cultural studies should be viewed as a good fit for furthering Pacific scholarship for several reasons. First, the “un-disciplined” nature of cultural studies fits the intellectual context of the Pacific wherein “there are few indigenous scholars for whom disciplinary training, institutional location, research interests, and methods converge to produce an easy identification of disciplinary identity” (White and Tengan 2001, 401). Second, because of this character, cultural studies can accommodate what Wood has referred to as the “transformed, multiplied, and transmixed genres” created by visionaries in the region (2003, 356). These genres range from mixed prose to lyrical poetry, from theatrical plays to political analysis, and from fiction to filmmaking. The list of cultural studies pioneers in the Pacific who are using these genres to present an indigenous perspective constitutes the “critical mass” of Pacific scholarship today, including Albert Wendt, Epeli Hau’ofa, Konai Helu Thaman, Haunani-Kay Trask, Vilsoni Hereniko, Vicente Diaz, and Teresia Teaiwa.

Perhaps most important, scholarship in the region can be theoretically invigorated by the perspectives of cultural studies. As Teaiwa has commented: “Why is cultural studies providing the cutting edge in Pacific studies? Because Pacific studies desperately lacks homegrown theory, and because there are problems with the Native” (2001, 346). The problems of essentialized and reified natives and this apparent lack of grassroots theory have begun to be addressed by the emerging theorization of indigenous epistemologies (Gegeo and Watson-Gegeo 2001; Meyer 2001). Borrowing theoretical frameworks from cultural studies will enable Pacific studies to engage with other ways of knowing in the sea of knowledges (Wood 2003). I will now discuss some of the theoretical borrowings that can be brought to bear on indigenous issues in Oceania.

Gramscian cultural studies’ focus on hegemony theory and articulation has much potential for addressing indigeneity in the contemporary Pacific. Hegemony theory has been extended beyond Antonio Gramsci’s focus on class and can be an especially useful

way to look at the dialectics of indigenous culture and resistance. As John Storey has argued:

It is the “Gramscian insistence” (before, with and after Gramsci), learnt from Marx, that we make culture and we are made by culture; there is agency and there is structure. It is not enough to celebrate agency; nor is it enough to detail the structure(s) of power; we must always keep in mind the dialectical play between resistance and incorporation. The best of cultural studies has always been mindful of this. (1996, 11)

The idea that culture and people constantly remake each other is helpful in the Pacific in addressing the temporal and spatial fixing of indigenous peoples as well as the polemic of authenticity.<sup>3</sup> In addition, without either celebrating indigenous resistance or dwelling fatalistically on the debilitating power of colonial domination, cultural studies can offer a “compromise equilibrium” between the agency of indigeneity and the structure of domination (Storey 1999, 150). A recognition of the way indigenous claims are complicit in and reinforcing of hegemony is also important in analyzing indigenous struggle.

As culture is a contested terrain wherein battles over meaning take place, Hall’s theory of articulation helps to illuminate how indigenous notions are both expressions and linkages in a particular context. James Clifford’s elaboration of “articulated sites of indigeneity,” as formulated in the context of the Pacific, is especially useful (2001, 472). This notion rejects both the essentialist assumption that indigeneity is predicated on primordial connections to land and sea, and the claim that indigenous discourse is symptomatic of a postmodern identity politics that is being played out through invented traditions. Instead, Clifford has argued, it is more useful to recognize the partial truths that both these positions represent and the politics they entail (2001, 472).

The links between identity and place, which are central components of indigeneity, can also be analyzed separately as indigenous articulations—these ideas can be hooked or unhooked from each other. Oceanic identities can be seen as fluid and contingent, existing betwixt and between tradition and genealogy on the one hand and decolonizing ideology and counter-hegemonic practices on the other. As Vilsoni Hereniko explained,

“Our cultural identities are therefore always in a state of becoming, a journey in which we never arrive; who we are is not a rock that is passed on from generation to generation, fixed and unchanging” (1999, 138). This cultural fluidity can be linked to Hall’s statement: “I believe irrevocably, identity is always an open, complex, unfinished game—always under construction. . . . it always moves into the future through a symbolic detour through the past” (1993, 362). Similarly, sites of indigenous articulation are also simultaneously constrained and enabled by the power of place and, as I discuss later, capitalism. Clifford explained it this way: “When thinking of differently articulated sites of indigeneity . . . one of the enduring constraints in the changing mix will always be the power of place” (2001, 481). Therefore, running through the fluidity of mobile and diasporic linkages to place in the globalizing world is an “enduring spatial nexus” of ancestral homelands—of Hawaiiki (Clifford 2001, 482).

#### NATIVE HAWAIIAN RESISTANCE AND INCORPORATION

Indigenous notions of culture, identity, and place are salient in Hawai`i. As is the case when considering the broader Pacific, it is crucial that the practice of cultural studies in Hawai`i engages with indigenous issues. As Michael Shapiro and his coauthors explained:

Whereas “indigenous” identities and concerns are largely absent from much of the “mainstream” of Euro-American cultural studies, in Hawai`i that is the arena where issues of culture, power and representation are most acute. (2002, 234)

Given the political climate in Hawai`i, an important question regarding cultural studies and its engagement with indigeneity is what it has to offer Native Hawaiians. One way cultural studies can engage with indigenous issues in Hawai`i is through a critical analysis of Native Hawaiian resistance. Before I examine the way in which it has been enacted and incorporated into the surfing industry in particular, I first provide a general overview of indigenous Hawaiian resistance.

Native Hawaiian resistance to US colonization—latent for much of the century following the overthrow of the Hawaiian Kingdom in 1893 and, later, the annexation of



Hawai'i by the United States in 1898—came to a head in the 1970s in response to urgent land issues. The most vocal protests were against the bombing of the island of Kaho'olawe by the US military and the eviction of Native Hawaiians from their lands in order to make way for tourist and residential development. Indigenous resistance also manifested itself as a revitalization of Hawaiian culture—a “Hawaiian cultural renaissance”—which over the last three decades has seen a re-flowering of the Hawaiian language, and a resurgence of traditional practices and cultural arts. The movement for Native Hawaiian sovereignty has sparked much political debate and captured the attention of local and national hegemonic forces in the islands and beyond. This resistance has been, and continues to be, driven by the recognition that many Native Hawaiians have been dispossessed of land, systematically alienated from their culture, and marginalized in terms of health, education, political power, and socioeconomic status. Reconnecting to the `āina (land) and culture has been an essential part of the Hawaiian renaissance and related activism, reinvigorating a sense of indigenous identity. Resistance has manifested itself in all aspects of life, ranging from protest marches to the occupation of sacred sites, and from promoting Hawaiian language education to dancing hula and surfing.

Native Hawaiian resistance found expression in the world of surfing through the creation of Hui o He'e Nalu. Emerging in the 1970s alongside the groundswell of Native Hawaiian political activism and cultural revitalization, the club was created by Native Hawaiian surfers and other watermen on the North Shore of O'ahu. Hui o He'e Nalu, which also included non-Hawaiian, “local” men, was formed to reassert local control of the ocean at a time when the North Shore had become the crowded mecca of surfing. The sport was becoming a popular global phenomenon; thus, the club represented a grassroots response to larger forces. Also known as the “black shorts” because of the black surf trunks that were worn exclusively by members of the club, the Hui became notorious for their aggression in the water, which was characterized by intimidation tactics and physical violence.

However, it would be a mistake to view this behavior simply as a kind of territorial turf war. More than this, Hui o He'e Nalu was formed as an outlet for

indigenous resistance to a longer history of colonization and displacement by outside forces.<sup>4</sup> As Isaiah Walker explained:

Hawaiian North Shore surfers . . . were reacting to a larger threat, one with a new yet familiar face: another wave of colonialism in a fight to preserve a significant cultural space, *ke kai* and *ka nalu* (the ocean and the surf). Unlike the land, this ancient playground had not yet been over-developed or exploited. (2005, 579)

In addition to random skirmishes with non-Hui members in the water, the Hui directed its resistance at the colonizing activities of the International Professional Surfing (IPS), established by Fred Hemmings and others in 1976. Hui o He'e Nalu protested at the IPS-sponsored competitions for several reasons. First, the competitions required exclusive use of the ocean and were dominated by non-local competitors. Second, the profits from the competitions did not trickle down to the North Shore community. Protests by members of the club resulted in violent confrontations between the Hui and the security guards who were hired by International Professional Surfing. A compromise was reached in 1978. After a tumultuous surf season, the organization agreed to hire members of the club as employees of the competitions, working as security, water patrol, and lifeguards. The Hui worked the competitions until 1987 when Hemmings contracted with the Hawaiian Water Patrol, founded by North Shore lifeguard and former president of the Hui, Terry Ahui.

Da Hui Inc, was created as a for-profit spin-off by some of the co-founders of Hui o He'e Nalu. Da Hui broke away from the club in 1993. This was a significant development for the club and the "black shorts." From 1979 to 1993, Quiksilver had been supplying the club with free black shorts, but since the break up, Da Hui has been producing its own clothing line. In the time that has passed since the schism, the presence of the club on the North Shore has seemed to wane as the presence of Da Hui has waxed. While these days the "black shorts" are not as visible on the North Shore, Da Hui's presence has been especially strong due to its sponsorship of events like "the Eddie," the Eddie Aikau Big Wave Invitational held at Waimea Bay.

## ARTICULATING RESISTANCE IN THE BLACK SHORTS

The theory of articulation is helpful for analyzing the way in which Native Hawaiian resistance is expressed through the “black shorts,” and for seeing how it is linked to larger structures and contexts. Members of Hui o He`e Nalu articulated meaning in both the production and consumption of the shorts because they designed the shorts and were the only ones to wear them. The black shorts were made and structured in such a way as to link them to Native Hawaiian resistance. Wearing the shorts in the ocean constituted a kind of cultural consumption, which could be interpreted as a spatial practice that reclaimed indigenous space. I will now briefly describe the design of the black shorts, after which time I will provide a critical reading of the black shorts as a cultural text, whose meaning emerges from a process of articulation.

The black board shorts are overlaid by a single red and a single yellow stripe running down the left seam of the shorts. The shorts also sport the Hui o He`e Nalu logo, which appears as a yellow petroglyphic human figure on a surfboard embroidered on the bottom front right side of the shorts. Above the petroglyph are the words “Hui o He`e Nalu” and below it are the words “North Shore, Oahu.”

While I recognize that alternative readings of the shorts as a text can be made, I suggest a “preferred reading” can be decoded from the way the material expression of the shorts is structured (Storey 1999, 157). To begin with, the black shorts can be read as connoting claims to Native Hawaiian heritage and authority. The colors red and yellow were markers of the chiefly class in ancient Hawai`i. Thus, the stripes on the shorts suggest not only a connection to ancient Hawai`i, but also a link to a specific class of Hawaiians—the ali`i (chiefs). The chiefs wore red- and yellow-colored helmets, capes, and malo (loin cloths) as markers of their status. In the kapu system,<sup>5</sup> the ali`i were set apart from commoners, who were required to avoid or show deference because of the chiefs’ greater mana (spiritual power and authority), or face the consequences, which on some occasions was death. As an interpretive exercise, we might view the black shorts as modern-day loincloths that can be read as Hui o He`e Nalu’s claiming to be the new chiefs of surfing, commanding respect and avoidance in the ocean. Like the ali`i of old, the contemporary Hui o He`e Nalu decreed the ocean kapu by sporting their black shorts and excluding nonmembers. Stories abound in the local Hawaiian surfing community

about Hui o He`e Nalu members both physically and verbally intimidating outsiders as they instituted and enforced a new kapu system in the ocean.

Linked to the indigenous resistance of Hui o He`e Nalu is a connection to a kind of authentic Hawaiian surf culture—an essence uncontaminated by outsiders. The petroglyph suggests a primordial link between the wearers of the shorts and the ancient Hawaiians who surfed these waters. That this is the preferred reading of the shorts is confirmed by statements on the Da Hui Web site, which claim: “After all, some of our ancestors did create the sport of surfing” and that Da Hui is trying to “keep it real.” The use of the petroglyph suggests an authentic genealogy “written in stone” by the ancients. Genealogy serves as a primary means by which Native Hawaiians claim their indigenous identity, and thus the shorts may be viewed as a signifier that is worn on the body to distinguish them from other bloodlines. In this way, both the act of resistance and the display of the authentic are inserted into the popular imagination.

Meaning was also produced in the consumption of the shorts as Hui members acted to “produce in use” by their spatial practices in the ocean (Storey 1999, 165). As members of the Hui used the shorts in the water, they constituted moving texts and living bo(a)rders, signifying a claim to ocean space. By paddling out to surf breaks and dominating the peak through intimidation and violence, the Hui reclaimed or reoccupied the ocean as a fluid extension of the `āina as Native Hawaiian territory. Their black shorts became metaphorical and physical boundaries that demarcated Hawaiian territory. The black shorts were worn to warn outsiders and represent the spatial extension of Native Hawaiian resistance from the land into the ocean.

#### LOCAL M(OCEANS) AND GLOBALIZATION

Hui o He`e Nalu and Da Hui primarily represent “local” entities. While both groups are predominantly made up of Native Hawaiians, they have always been articulated with “local” members who were not Native Hawaiian. The problem of overcrowding in the ocean, which stemmed from both the popularity and professionalization of surfing, has been felt by Native Hawaiians and non-Hawaiians alike, and they have banded together in a common cause. Jonathan Okamura’s comments on “local” identity are important here:

Local identity has gained greater significance and has come to represent the common identity of people in Hawai`i who have an appreciation of and commitment to the land, peoples, and cultures of the islands. Local culture and identity have emerged as expressions of resistance and opposition to external forces of development and change that are perceived as threatening the quality of life in the islands and that have marginalized Hawai`i's people. (1998, 273–274)

Thus, Hui o He`e Nalu was forged out of a sense of a shared connection to Hawai`i and a common attachment to the land and sea. Da Hui, the company's name itself, connotes a "local" identity through the use of Pidgin (Hawaiian Creole English), which may be viewed as one of the quintessential markers of local identity in Hawai`i. From this perspective, then, Da Hui could be celebrated as a "local" business.

Localism arose from historically shared resistance to subordination by the haole-dominated plantation economy,<sup>6</sup> and as a defensive response to outside pressures. In addition, it has been championed because of the benign nature of ethnic relations in Hawai`i, compared to ethnic conflicts on the US mainland or abroad. Local identity in Hawai`i is celebrated by some as a heritage that *all* residents of Hawai`i share, implying harmonious ethnic relations characterized by a ubiquitous "aloha spirit."

However, in light of these romanticized notions of a multiethnic paradise, it is important to point out that the indigenous claims of Native Hawaiians are different from those of locals, and localism may be viewed as obscuring that critical difference. As Okamura has outlined (1998), localism denies and distorts the tensions that exist in interethnic relations; it also has major shortcomings, among which is the maintenance of hegemonies which keep Native Hawaiians in a subordinate status in the social stratification of Hawai`i. Localism in Hawai`i thus masks the real differences between ethnic groups in terms of power relations. As Haunani-Kay Trask has argued (2000, 4), the use of the "'local' identity tag blurs the history of Hawai`i's only indigenous people" at the same time that it denies the way in which non-Hawaiians benefit from the subjugation of Native Hawaiians. Thus, the Native Hawaiian resistance practiced by Hui

o He`e Nalu has been incorporated by a localism that continues to subordinate Native Hawaiians.

The increasing importance of localism worldwide is the major paradox of globalization and its homogenizing effects. However, this waxing of localism may be deceptive, as Hall has explained:

the strengthening of “the local” is probably less the revival of the stable identities of “locally settled communities” of the past, and more that tricky version of “the local” which operates within, and has been thoroughly reshaped by “the global” and operates largely within its logic. (1993, 354)

From the beginning, the Hui was involved with a “tricky version of the local,” and Da Hui’s recent activities to compete in the global market operate within the logic of capitalism. That Da Hui acts locally but thinks globally was expressed in this quote from their Web site ([www.dahui.com](http://www.dahui.com)) in February 2005:

[Da Hui] is a profit organization which helps and sponsors local surfers. It competes on the world marketplace with all the other companies that want to have a Hawaiian look and feel. It is the only company owned by 90% Hawaiian people of its kind that competes on the world market. After all, some of our ancestors did create the sport of surfing.

Thus, in addition to its local incorporation, the indigenous resistance found in the Hui o He`e Nalu has become commodified by Da Hui to satisfy the demands of a global capitalism, where there is a market for “lifestyle” items. Da Hui sponsors both local and not-so-local surfers, and in this way its products can be found on surfboards, products, and bodies in and out of the ocean throughout the world. Its fluid logo, like graffiti in local waters, also surfs the Net, as it claims space in the global market as an advertisement of a “local” and authentic Hawaiian lifestyle. The local, authentic, and indigenous difference feeds into the demands of global capitalism and Da Hui deftly rides both local and global waves to shore on the back of Native Hawaiian resistance.

Da Hui products have become the commodified form of Hui o He`e Nalu in the global marketplace by clever textual strategies, which have enabled the spin-off to represent a commodified kind of resistance and authenticity. Da Hui has fashioned the resistance of the club into commodity form by textually obscuring the difference between the club and the corporation. The separation of the two entities is made murky by the fact that some of Da Hui's owners are also founding members of the Hui o He`e Nalu. In this way Da Hui is doubly authentic—first as part of an authentic surf culture and second as a creation of authentic and original members of the club. The difference is further blurred linguistically (as mentioned earlier, “da hui” is the way one would say “the Hui”—the shortened form of the Hui o He`e Nalu—in Hawai`i Pidgin) as well as textually. Da Hui's logo is identical to the Hui o He`e Nalu logo except instead of reading “Hui o He`e Nalu,” it reads “Friends of Da Hui.” The Da Hui Web site subtly explains the difference between the club and the company, but it is in the interest of Da Hui to downplay this difference in order to allow consumers into this exclusive club as “friends of Da Hui.” Consumers can “buy into” the club and become friends of the Hui o He`e Nalu by simply buying Da Hui products. However, they can't actually buy or wear the black shorts, which are restricted to members of Hui o He`e Nalu. What consumers *can* buy are the commodified forms of the black shorts as authentic and resistant texts.

#### WATERED-DOWN RESISTANCE

In addressing what is at stake for Native Hawaiians, the resistance found in both hui—the company and the club—can be seen as watered down. This is not to make the claim that there is any kind of *pure* resistance, but instead to argue that because of the way both organizations have both local and global indigenous articulations, the resistance within them is complicit in and reinforcing of local and global hegemonies. From a native perspective, this demonstrates the way that indigenous claims can be co-opted, incorporated, commodified, obscured, and minimized. This sense of being “closed out”—a surfing term referring to when a wave breaks all around the surfer leaving no room to maneuver and often resulting in a wipeout—is nothing new to Native Hawaiians. However, as the case of the Hui and Da Hui demonstrates, cultural studies has theoretical

tools to offer, which, in conjunction with indigenous theorizing, can help to maneuver through the whitewash of cultural phenomena operating at local and global scales.

Most of the power of a breaking wave is at the peak of the wave (the center) and the surfer “cuts back” between the peak and the shoulder of the wave (the margin). If too close to the center, the surfer wipes out, and if too far on the margin, she loses the wave. Indigenous resistance finds agency to maneuver on the structured hegemony of the wave, beginning on the margins, incorporated by the center, and constantly cutting back between the peak and the shoulder, on local waves in a global ocean.

KALI FERMANTEZ is a PhD candidate in cultural geography at the University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa. His dissertation research focuses on how the geographical concept of place shapes the reassertion of Hawaiian cultural identity and empowers Native Hawaiians. He also has graduate certificates in Pacific Island studies and cultural studies from UH Mānoa. These research interests, combined with a longtime love of surfing, provided the inspiration for this article.

### *Notes*

1. The Billabong XXL Award is given to the surfer who rides the single biggest wave of the year. Judging is based on the analysis of images of the ride, and the photographer who captures the wave is awarded \$5,000. The surfer’s prize is awarded in the amount of \$1,000 per foot, with a minimum award of \$60,000. Makua’s ride earned him \$66,000 ([www.billabongxxl05.com](http://www.billabongxxl05.com)).
2. As a noun, *hui* means “club” or “organization” and as a verb, it means “to gather.” Da Hui Inc. is a for-profit surf company, which I also refer to as “Da Hui.” Hui o He‘e Nalu means club of wave riders, or, literally, “wave sliders,” and in this paper I will also refer to the club as simply “the Hui.”
3. See White and Tengan 2001 for an insightful discussion of the polemics of authenticity.
4. The brief history of Hui o He‘e Nalu presented in the next two paragraphs is derived mainly from Isaiah Walker’s more detailed account, “Terrorism or Native Protest? The Hui ‘O He‘e Nalu and Hawaiian Resistance to Colonialism” (2005), and his 2006 dissertation, “North Shore Reign,” which was a history of the Hui. Isaiah is a friend of mine and we have surfed together many times. However, we came upon the subject simultaneously from different angles—catching the same wave as is common, going in different directions and making our own maneuvers in our approaches.
5. The kapu system was a social, political, and religious ordering of society in which status was based on the possession or lack of mana. The paramount chief was at the top of the social hierarchy and the commoners were on the bottom, with the priestly/artisan class and lesser ali‘i in the middle.



6. Haole, literally “without breath,” by tradition refers to foreigners, but in the contemporary local Hawaiian context refers to white people (both local and non-local).

### *References*

Clifford, James

2001 Indigenous Articulations. *The Contemporary Pacific* 13:468–490.

Da Hui, Inc.

2005 Da Hui Web site (www.dahui.com) [accessed 23 February 2005]

Diaz, Vicente M, and J Kēhaulani Kauanui

2001 Native Pacific Cultural Studies on the Edge. *The Contemporary Pacific* 13:315–341.

Gegeo, David Welchman, and Karen A Watson-Gegeo

2001 “How We Know”: Rural Villagers Doing Indigenous Epistemology. *The Contemporary Pacific* 13:55–88.

Hall, Stuart

1993 Culture, Community, Nation. *Cultural Studies* 7 (3): 349–363.

Hau`ofa, Epeli

1993 Our Sea of Islands. In *A New Oceania: Rediscovering Our Sea of Islands*, edited by Eric Waddell, Vijay Naidu, and Epeli Hau`ofa, 2–16. Suva: School of Social and Economic Development, University of South Pacific, in association with Beake House. Reprinted in *The Contemporary Pacific* 6:147–161.

1998 The Ocean in Us. *The Contemporary Pacific* 10:391–410.

Hereniko, Vilsoni

1999 Representations of Cultural Identities. In *Inside Out: Literature, Cultural Politics, and Identity in the New Pacific*, edited by Vilsoni Hereniko and Rob Wilson, 137–166. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc.

Meyer, Manulani A

2001 Our Own Liberation: Reflections on Hawaiian Epistemology. *The Contemporary Pacific* 13:124–148.

Okamura, Jonathan Y

1998 The Illusion of Paradise: Privileging Multiculturalism in Hawai`i. In *Making Majorities*, edited by Drew Gladney, 264–284. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.

Shapiro, Michael J, Geoffrey M White, and Mig-Bao Yue

2002 Introduction. *Cultural Values* 6 (3): 229–238.

Storey, John

1996 Cultural Studies: An Introduction. In *What is Cultural Studies? A Reader*, edited by John Storey, 1–13. London: Arnold.

1999 *Cultural Consumption and Everyday Life*. London: Arnold.

Teaiwa, Teresia

2001 L(o)osing the Edge. *The Contemporary Pacific* 13:343–357.

Trask, Haunani-Kay

2000 Settlers of Color and “Immigrant” Hegemony: “Locals” in Hawai‘i. *Amerasia Journal* 26 (2): 1–24.

Walker, Isaiah Helekunihi

2005 Terrorism or Native Protest? The Hui ‘O He‘e Nalu and Hawaiian Resistance to Colonialism. *Pacific Historical Review* 74 (4): 575–601.

2006 North Shore Reign: The Hui ‘O He‘e Nalu and Hawaiian Resistance to Colonialism. PhD dissertation, Department of History, University of California, Santa Barbara.

White, Geoffrey M, and Ty Kāwika Tengan

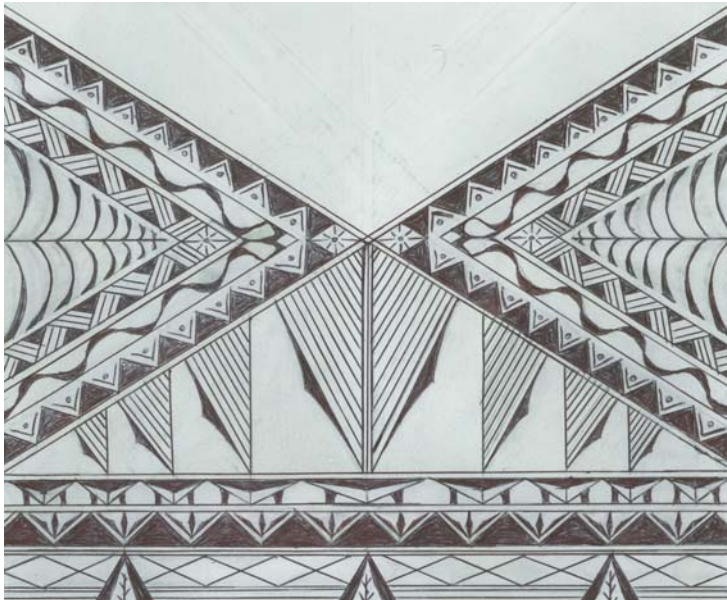
2001 Disappearing Worlds: Anthropology and Cultural Studies in Hawai‘i and the Pacific. *The Contemporary Pacific* 13:381–416.

Wood, Houston

2003 Cultural Studies for Oceania. *The Contemporary Pacific* 15:340–374.



*Between Sisters*





## *Hangin' with the Sistas in Melsisi*

Sara Lightner

*The amazing ladies in their blue coatdresses and white wimples walked into my life (or perhaps I stumbled into theirs!) and changed it forever. I look back on my years as an English teacher at Collège de Melsisi, on the island of Pentecost in Northern Vanuatu, and all I can do is shake my head in wonder. The sisters didn't know me from Adam, but they folded me into their hearts and showed me an acceptance and warmth that is hard to believe. In the following reflection, I reminisce on my time living in the convent on the hill, in a life where "Je vous salue, Marie" was a daily phrase, and where the laughter of the sisters echoed down the hall and into my little room. During times of homesickness or uncertainty, the sound of that laughter kept me grounded and gave me solace. During times of happiness and celebration, their chuckles were infectious. To the sisters with whom I lived in Melsisi—Pascalina, Angela, and Gemma—I dedicate this piece.*

---

From January 2001 to December 2002 I lived with three Ni-Vanuatu Catholic sisters at la Mission de Melsisi, the home of the Notre Dame de Sept Douleurs (Our Mother of Seven Sorrows Catholic Church), on the island of Pentecost in northern Vanuatu. I must admit that it was not my first choice of residence, and when that rickety truck dumped me at the convent—a huge, foreboding, cement structure, on a hill dotted with cow patties, in the middle of what I then perceived as nowhere—I forced myself to smile when I really wanted to cry. The church was in the (not so graceful) process of falling down as a result of major earthquake damage in 1999, there was a cemetery plot directly behind the convent that seemed just a bit eerie, and the wind blew through the valley with such force that I feared I would be whipped out to sea. The physical surroundings of my new home in Central Pentecost made me feel less than welcome. I was assured that this was just “a temporary measure” until the school found a house for me, the mission’s new *pis kops* (Peace Corps Volunteer). That temporary measure lasted nearly two years!



*Photo 1. Sr Angela (Ranmawat, Pentecost), Sr Pascalina (Loanatom, Tanna), Sr Gemma (Walarano, Malakula).  
Photo by Sara Lightner.*

From the moment the truck dropped me and my *puskat* (kitten) on the doorstep, the sisters were giving me life lessons. The first one came very quickly. Sister Pascalina grabbed one of my bags and ushered me to my room, which was located in the bottom level of the convent, down a dark and claustrophobic hallway. Metal doors with deadbolts, three on either side of the hallway, welcomed me to my new home. The rooms were usually bolted shut and void of everything but cobwebs and cockroaches, and there were little prison-esque windows to the left of each door that faced the hallway. The windows were small—only three louvers—and they were up so high that you couldn't even see through them. I could only imagine the ghosts of sisters and would-be sisters of generations past occupying these little rooms. At the end of the hallway, on the right (west, ocean facing) side, we came to a particularly beat-up looking door. As Sister

Pascalina sifted and rattled through her bundle of keys, located the longest skeleton key I had ever seen, unlocked the door, and slid out the bolt, the noise reverberated along the cement walls.

The room held a single bed with broken springs and an inch-thick foam mattress, a little sink (how happy was I that Melsisi had a gravity-driven water system, with pipes carrying water from the bush!), a chair and a table, and a rickety red wardrobe. That was it—*c'est tout*. But what a gorgeous view of the ocean sparkling in the distance! The vibrant green points that jutted out along the western coastline contrasted with the deep blue of the waves that lapped (and sometimes violently crashed) onto the smooth stones of the shore. Little did I realize that I would come to know every nook and cranny of that coast as I waited and watched for cargo ships during all hours of night and day. Just beyond the window, the New Caledonian mango tree stood in all its stateliness, with a variety of colorful flowers and crotons skirting its gnarled trunk. (At the time I did not appreciate the fact that the barbed-wire fence surrounding the sisters' garden was used to keep out mango thieves, who desperately wanted to partake of the golden flesh of the prized New Caledonian mango with its flat seed and nearly red skin!).

But back to my first lesson. I carelessly dumped one of my boxes on my new bed and a rat bolted across the floor, jarred into movement by the box hitting the springs. I screamed bloody murder and catapulted myself onto the chair as the rat dived behind the monstrous wardrobe. (In all of my years as a farm girl, I was never able to overcome my fear of those red-eyed beasts!) In one fluid movement, Sister Pascalina walked to the other side of the room (which was not an extremely long jaunt) and calmly and casually slammed the wardrobe against the cement block wall. Thud. She pulled back the wardrobe, grabbed the deceased rat by its tail, and matter-of-factly tossed it through the open glass windows to the foot of the mango tree. I truly believe that, at that exact moment, our friendship was born.

---

We named our chickens and then ate them for dinner. We begged the gregarious mission priest to set up his generator so that we could watch a black-and-white version of *The Swiss Family Robinson* in French while we drank kava. We sipped hot sodas on



Sunday afternoons at the beach and devised stone-throwing competitions. Sister Pascalina couldn't drink kava in front of her brother (a priest) because it was a cultural *tabu*, but he could still buy it for us if I took him the plastic container. They teased me about having a boyfriend and screened my calls on the convent phone, nearly sending me into orbit. We dressed up in frilly island dresses and drank kava, leaning on the verandah railing and pretending we were on a ship's deck. We ate bread dunked in Milo, by the light of the kerosene lamp. Sometimes the sisters even made their special *la soupe* with pasta sent from the Italian priest on Tanna.

We went fishing on the reef with our bottle-and-string fishing apparatuses. We swapped stories about our families, and I entertained them with amusing anecdotes of Iowa farm life. They went with me to the beach in the middle of the night to meet the cargo ship so that I could pick up my mail. We commiserated over our visitor from hell, the French tourist Dominique, who stole my toilet paper and my garlic. We made "pizza" with tin fish, catsup, and cake flour to sell at the school's *nakamal* (kava bar). We constructed the thin, tasteless wafers for communion. Sister Gemma taught me how to gut a chicken and wrap its intestines around a stick to roast them over the fire. Sister Pascalina taught me how to make a coconut broom from the spines of individual coconut leaves. Sister Angela took me to the health clinic to watch the birth of a baby. Sister Pascalina taught me how to scrub my clothes with intensive vigor until stains didn't even have a chance of survival. She also educated me about the necessity of throwing away one's used peanut shells and not leaving clothes on the line overnight, as a caution against *nakaemas* (black magic). The sisters welcomed my guests with open arms, and even drank a beer with my dad on the convent verandah. They felt it necessary to dance around me as bodyguards when we went to the Independence Day festivities; no *man Pentikos* (boy from Pentecost) could come within ten feet of me! They gave me advice when I was sick and made me lemongrass tea to cure my ills. Sometimes we laughed so hard we cried. Sometimes we sat in silence. They touched my life in ways that, at the time, I didn't realize. And for that and so many things, I am grateful.

I am a graduate student in the UH Mānoa Center for Pacific Islands studies and a degree fellow at the East-West Center. The title of my thesis project is "Ples Blong Olgeta Sista: Ni-Vanuatu Catholic Sisters Navigating Places and Spaces." I lived in Vanuatu as a US

Peace Corps Volunteer from October 1999 to February 2005, on North Efate, Pentecost, and in the capital, Port Vila. I taught English at Onesua Presbyterian College (North Efate) and Collège de Melsisi (Pentecost), and I coordinated the Vanuatu National History Curriculum Project, housed at the Vanuatu Cultural Centre (located in Vila). I also spent from August to December 2006 in Vanuatu, simultaneously “hangin’ with the sistas” and working on my thesis project.

*Salt Water*

Yola Gray

I stood on the shore and waited for the tide  
my lantern held high  
the flame burning bright and sure.  
But the tide never returned.  
And though my eyes were filled with salt water  
my mouth crying salt water  
my belly taut and heavy with salt water  
the tide never returned.

So broken and hurting  
I lay down on the platform  
inhaled the smoke from the fire  
the smell of ava`a and mave  
and watched the flame in my lantern slowly die.  
My eyes filled with salt water  
my mouth swallowing cries for salt water  
my belly taut and heavy with salt water.

*After the Swim*

Yola Gray

After swimming I sat on the hot concrete to dry  
Smiling, happy, content.  
And when I got up I looked  
at the wet imprint I had left behind and said:  
Dear God, let that not be the size of my arse!  
But it was!  
I might have inherited my red-haired father's fair skin,  
his tendency to stress over the slightest thing.  
But I inherited my mother's arse.  
The Papuan arse.  
It is not unlike the Tolai arse  
Although differing in shape (perhaps texture)  
they are both large.  
I haven't gone swimming since.

*Letter to Julia*

Yola Gray

Dear Julia,

I really think we ought to reconsider washing on the platform in the dead of night when we are in the village. Apart from the fact that there are thousands of mosquitoes hovering around intent on injecting us with malaria (yet again), it has come to my attention that washing in the dead of night on the platform is not, shall we say, in my best interest. Apart from the fact that you are first blood and therefore it is my job (being the not-so-important younger sister) to pump and then carry infinite amounts of water in buckets on my head across the road, through the mud, while dodging pigs, chickens, cousins, and other pests attracted to the idea of watching me flounder, slip, and drench myself, it is quite dangerous.

I refer to the night you washed on the platform steps and I washed on the actual platform. You may well remember that you left the step slimy with soap and did not bother to rinse it off. I believe that this is perhaps the main reason that I, after rinsing properly on the platform, somehow managed to find myself on my back in the middle of a puddle of mud. If you had told me that the step was slippery, I might have taken greater care when stepping on it, and not have found myself completing a full somersault in the air and nearly breaking my neck in the process. I must say, however, that it was my quick reflexes and perhaps a bit of luck that prevented the towel I was wearing from making its escape and showcasing “the goods,” so to speak, while I completed this aerial display.

You might also remember the scene that followed. I do not think that anybody in the village (perhaps even people in New Ireland) would be in any doubt that it was me who was lying sprawled, semi-naked, in a puddle of mud. No, I think that your shouting at me was pretty much heard by everyone. I am in no doubt that they knew it was me who tried to be the next “skin glow like fluoro” comet, because you were yelling in English. Who else would be yelling in English in the middle of the village in the dead of night? I realize that you were worried that I had in fact broken my back—how could I not realize,

when you were yelling in my face, “Speak to me! And don’t you dare be dead.” But I also think you should not have taken offense when I not-so-politely told you to “fuck off!” I was in pain, after all, and would have preferred your help rewashing rather than watching you flounce off in a huff. I do hope you will take this into consideration the next time we foolishly decide to wash in the dead of night on the platform.

I was also going to write about how inconsiderate it is of you to rush a person through her ablutions. Spending a good part of the day walking around with the back of my skirt tucked into my underpants is not my idea of a good time. I shall, however, save that for another letter.

Many Regards,

Yola, your slightly frustrated, next in line to be first blood, younger sister.

YOLA GRAY is of mixed Papua New Guinean and Australian heritage. Yola’s Papua New Guinean family are from the Kairuku district of the Central Province of Papua New Guinea. She is a founding member of Sunameke Pacific Island Performance and is a single mum to Vasa.

*Dearest Yola*

Julia Gray

Dearest Yola,

You make me laugh. Especially when you “stack it,” crash into nonexistent objects, find holes in floors with spectacular tumbling ability, when stressed run around like a headless chicken, wake up like a polar bear with a tooth ache, laugh so loud that my ears ring, walk from Salelologa to the markets with your skirt tucked into your undies, get eaten by small fishes that are related to piranha, and turn into a vampire when people make mistakes while we perform. Yes, all of these things would be sadly missed if you were normal.

On a serious note, I am first blood, director of your artistic abilities and ultimately your OLDER SISTER. Please learn to accept your lot in life as an extension of me.

Love your best sister in the whole world,

Julia

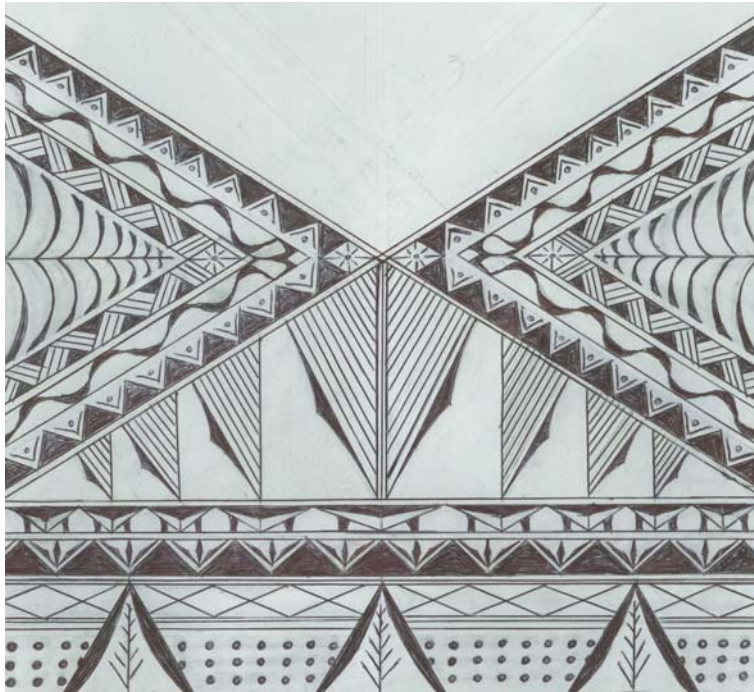
PS: Where is the cup of tea that I asked for an hour ago?

Thanks for proofreading this letter.

I love you.

JULIA GRAY is the director of Surnameke Pacific Island Performance, based in Darwin, Australia. She is of Papua New Guinean and Australian heritage and has been exposed to the impact of two separate and distinctive cultures. Julia’s Papua New Guinean family is from the Kairuku district of the Central Province of Papua New Guinea. Since graduating from Adelaide University, she has spent her professional life as a freelance dancer and choreographer, finding varied ways to express her heritage. Julia has worked with Tracks Dance Theatre Performance, Drum Drum, Cultural Village of the Northern Territory, and the Palmerston Festival as cultural dance coordinator, choreographer, singer and dancer. She has also collaborated with international and community cultural dance groups in Darwin.

*Post-Colonial Reflections?*







*Chain Reaction*

B. David Kombako

sunlight is good  
it takes away darkness & fear  
it reveals truth  
reveals last night's events  
desert dust covered with blood  
of guns and crimes of political convenience  
the buckets of tears overflow  
to nurture an army of young martyrs

I go to bed every night  
my door secure  
my breathing content  
my mind at peace

Outside my room  
somewhere tonight  
a door is open  
unborn babies sleep fatherless  
theirs is a world where mommie  
will play mommie & daddy

*Manoa's Leisure*

B. David Kombako

Sleepy eyes, Mona Lisa smile  
coarse tongue flicking  
across hairy lips  
from dawn till dusk

beauty saunters gracefully  
across the corridors  
keeps on licking its paws  
wetting her lips with cat cosmetic

i like your style  
so give me your advice  
your curiosity is killing me

*Honolulu Evening*

B. David Kombako

Mascara and shades  
Lipstick thick red  
Slim limbs in tight jeans and blouse  
she glides with grace  
eyes follow with wonderment

I'm fascinated  
my problem solved  
an animated mannequin  
keeping me company on the lonely sidewalks

*Ice Age*

B. David Kombako

me see this brada  
going to da dogs  
not a moment of salvation left in his soul  
from nothing to rags  
fatalism is the destiny

he met the devil in the rolled-up dollar  
sending Nicaragua up his nostrils  
salty crystals mixed with innocent blood  
perfect blend for an easy way to the sun  
a million mental signals eclipsed

it gets better by the minute  
sensual and carnal tastes of naked flesh  
watered by oily sweat  
the heat is on  
the magic begins  
the trump card gets drawn  
and life slips silently out

*Blind Truth*

B. David Kombako

Beautiful people in their beautiful islands  
Beautiful people in their tall glass towers  
Old Mr. Time is the Master in the towers  
& Mr. Franklin and Co. are the genies on the wrinkled papers  
Your wish is their command  
And indeed!  
It worked for Winona Ryder

Is she selfish or is she dreaming?  
She wants to smoke for 25 cents  
and it has to be 25 feet away from anybody and towers!  
she is lonely and suspicious  
Mrs. Liberty is ugly with her nightie  
and Lady Justice does see!

But she does not exit this world just yet  
there is a packet of smoke to blow away  
a glass of beer to dump  
and a beautiful life to kill.

*Sad Story*

B. David Kombako

That sweet Melanesian chocolate  
cheek so meek  
smile so tantalizing  
in my own corner that night  
curiosity rears its ugly head  
in my troubled mind

our eyes met  
our minds made up  
clumsy and sweaty greetings followed  
two strangers in hyper tension

she tasted freedom too early  
didn't even jump the 6th grade  
life seemed pretty dull beyond, she said  
we listened and learned our lives  
that hot night

she made up her mind  
a waitress in a restaurant  
sounds cool  
seeing the money flicking  
and the Chinese dishes floating  
this is it, she said to me.

*Birthday*

B. David Kombako

Candles, candies, and cakes  
 balloons and paper plates  
 sweet little squeals of delight  
 that crack the still afternoon air  
  
 wishes evaporate from one heart  
 to another  
 the past is fondled with nostalgia  
 the future contemplated with caution  
  
 a lone balloon drifts upwards  
 into unknown paths  
 guided only by the soft breeze  
 gathering memories as it floats away  
 to eternity

B. DAVID KOMBAKO is from Papua New Guinea and graduated from the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa with a master's in sociology in 2004. His master's thesis was a critique of the discourse on "failed states," drawing on experiences from Papua New Guinea. He is currently a teaching assistant at the University of Papua New Guinea, and is involved in a research project that is focused on ecotourism in village communities and HIV/AIDS in urban areas. His research interests include ethnicity/multiculturalism, nation and state, symbolic interactionism, the sociology of knowledge, tourism, contemporary entertainment, and indigenous capital and critical social theory. He hopes to return to the United States in the not too distant future to pursue a PhD in political sociology.



*Mwahiei*

Emelihter Kihleng

I was not proud to be a Micronesian today  
 little Kosraean girls dancing Tahitian in coconut shell bras  
 short pink lava lava with matching lipstick—too sexy  
 Chuukese stick dance sloppy  
 fat man dancing on stage with everyone—ridiculous  
 I sweated in the Ala Moana heat moaning *ohtier!* over again  
 amidst screaming Mortlockese ladies with dyed red and blonde hair

I went to Micronesia Friendship Day 2002 curious  
 hoping for something  
 I went to F.S.M. Constitution Day 2003  
 knowing, but I still went  
 never wanting to miss out on cultural performances that never happen  
 eager to listen to broken English political speeches  
 telling us how “a government cannot survive without its people”

Palikir officials who don’t give a fuck  
 about us  
 going to school  
 cooking at Zippy’s  
 cleaning parking lots  
 stuffing ads into the Honolulu Advertiser  
 drinking sakau pehs  
 eating piaia from the can

“Micronesia—to the max”

24 years of broken government  
celebration of American development  
Pohnpei, Chuuk, Yap, Kosrae  
people too different to get along  
four inventions forced under Federation  
a unification, we Pohnpeians, voted against

I saw no Yapese, a few Kosraeans  
a family of Pohnpeians, mostly from Kitti  
wearing T-shirts that said *Darak Pohnpei*  
Chuukese everywhere  
Micronesian strangers to me

I see no occasion to mark  
no Micronesia to rejoice over  
“ethnic dances” from Polynesia and U.S.A.  
four stars separated by blue

I cry for us Micronesians  
I saw what I wish I hadn’t  
embarrassed by the clarity

*Wini en Pohnpei*

Emelihter Kihleng

my silasil travels with me  
from the wet thatch roof nahs  
next to the imwen wini  
where people go to die from Western medicine  
and lack of it

in the nahs  
the man bathed my father in green  
and gave him the last bottles for drinking  
Pahpa, nearly healed, from a week of treatment

he asked me  
*ke anahne?*  
do you need it?  
round brown wini  
grains of earth  
I swallowed

he told me  
if anyone has done anything to you in the past  
it won't work  
if anyone does anything to you in the future  
the same  
carry my silasil with me I must  
and never get it wet  
never get it wet

*kowe mehn Pohnpei*  
*ke pahn kang wini en Pohnpei*

it's in your blood

Nohno Elihse, lien Nett  
my grandma's dear friend  
made me little sennit bracelets  
braided with magic words  
childhood silasil

to keep limwohdeleng from taking me  
eni from touching me  
bruises on my skin evidence

Pahpa wove me pahie  
from young coconut leaves  
to make them smile  
only true smiles  
whisper sweetness in my ear

watch who you make friends with  
and what you tell  
especially what you eat  
and who you eat with  
comb your hair alone

Pohnpeians know  
jealousy, competition, evil  
a society that thrives  
on illness in others

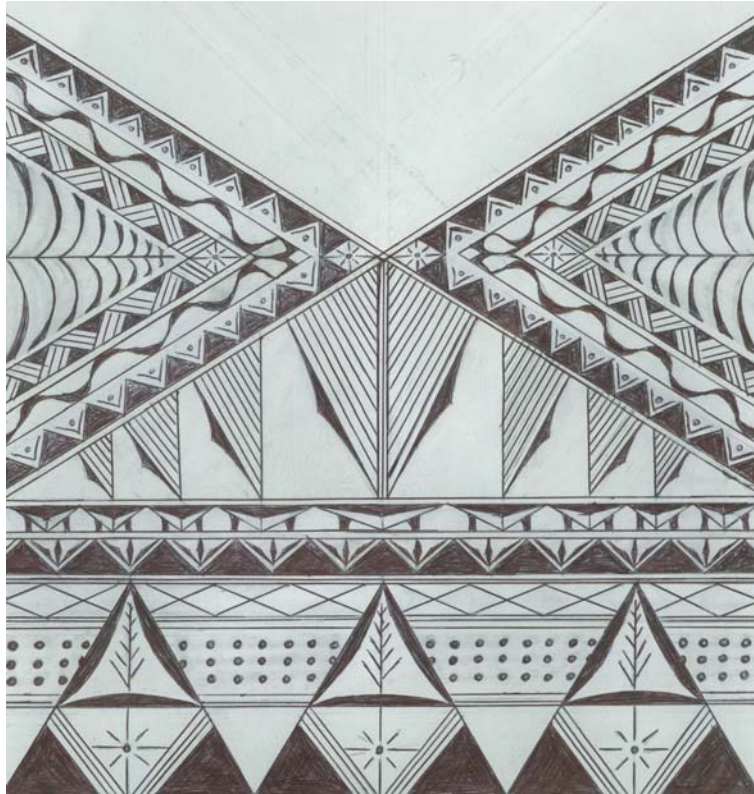
through winahni, causing  
deformities, death, making  
kihl grow on face, arms, feet  
sending creatures like  
brown spotted kieil to  
crawl around your home  
spitting poison

it's in the blood.

EMELIHTER KIHLENG is from Pohnpei Island, Micronesia. She is currently finishing a master's degree in English, Creative Writing, at the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa where she has written a creative thesis of poetry and prose. Her poetry has appeared in *Bamboo Ridge*, *Tinfish*, *Xcp: Cross Cultural Poetics*, *Boundary 2*, and *Chain*.

## *Institutional Relations*

---





# *Negotiating an Oceanic Space at the University of Hawai`i at Mānoa*

Lu`ukia Archer, Malia Ka`aihue, U`i Keli`ikuli

## *Introduction*

The people of Oceania share similar experiences, connected through common cultural traits and political experiences in this all-encompassing ocean. Having inhabited the Pacific for centuries, these amazing navigators traversed the sea with skill, maintaining successful trade routes, spreading fundamental spiritual and social practices, and fostering strong political relationships. Unfortunately, these shared experiences deteriorated through the colonization of Oceania by western powers such as England, France, Germany, and Spain. The standard tools of colonialism, including uncontrolled epidemics, the imposition of foreign religious doctrines, and the privatization of land, have been successful in acquiring territories for European countries and displacing Islanders from their lands. Laws of “discovery” legitimized the arrival, conquest, and domination of the natives inhabiting what were imagined to be “virgin” lands. Imperialism operating under the political myth of “terra nullius” also furthered the doctrines of dispossession, allowing imperialists to claim the “unoccupied lands” that belonged to those they perceived as heathen or pagan populations.

Having claimed the islands and waters of Oceania, the imperial nations of the West proceeded to impose arbitrary racial boundaries resulting in the formation of Polynesia, Melanesia, and Micronesia. The implementation of various colonial languages and systems of governance then broadened the separation and further eroded traditional inter-Oceanic relations. As we Islanders struggle to maintain our identities in the contemporary era, these aspects of colonization are regularly contested by Oceanic scholars who refuse to disassociate problems of the past from situations of the present. From an Oceanic perspective, as David Gegeo has noted, a problem is “laid to rest only after it has been truly solved in a manner that meaningfully benefits the communities. . . . So we will continue to talk about issues that in Anglo-European scholarship, are already old” (2001, 492).

Oceanic scholars and students can play a significant role in reestablishing inter-Oceanic connections at the university level. For the purposes of this paper the University



of Hawai`i at Mānoa (UHM) serves as the site of engagement. Political alliances between Oceanic peoples to counter western hegemony in the current period are as crucial as the cultural, political, and social ties that existed between Islanders during the precolonial era. Although fraught with many complications, (re)building traditional and modern connections between peoples of Oceania at UH Mānoa is an important endeavor. Universities (particularly those located in Oceania), as colonial/imperial institutions, offer milieus for Oceanic peoples to engage and challenge western discourses as well as (re)formulate indigenous connections through cultural, political, and theoretical practices and exchanges.

A perceived lack of involvement and interaction between peoples of Oceania, particularly students, at UH Mānoa is the impetus for this discussion. The ideas expressed in this paper developed out of a collaborative effort and represent our experiences as native Hawaiian graduate students in the Indigenous Politics program of the UHM Political Science Department reflecting on the gap we observed between Pacific peoples on our campus.

### *Traditions in Inter-Oceanic Relations*

Nānā i ke kumu, or look to the source/past, is a powerful Hawaiian proverb that reminds us to look internally to our own history, our kūpuna, our theology, our knowledge, and, most importantly, our genealogies. “Genealogies are the Hawaiian concept of time, and they order the space around us” (Kame`eleihiwa 1992, 19). The peoples of Oceania are similarly grounded in genealogical discourses and share a history of rich inter-Oceanic relations, including but not limited to religious and political exchanges. By revisiting traditional methods of inter-Oceanic practices it may be possible to resurrect alliances from the past to triumph over the overwhelming problems we face as peoples dispossessed through imperial conquest.

Religious exchanges were one of the most prominent examples of inter-Oceanic relations. The Pele mo`olelo, for example, found in Hawaiian and Tahitian oral traditions, recounts her travels throughout the Pacific. In these mo`olelo, Pele travels from her homeland, Tahiti, across Oceania in search of a new home. Her voyaging party sails northwest to the Hawaiian Islands and later she makes her permanent home at Kīlauea on

the island of Hawai`i. Pele leads an expedition and successfully brings a new religion to Hawai`i (Emerson 1997).

Another relevant example is the political alliance of Taputapuātea (located on the island of Ra`iatea) with other Pacific islands. Cook Island historians confirm that the “Marae Taputapuātea was an old marae in the 1200s. Up until that time Polynesians would gather there every few years for great ceremonies” (Longstaff 1999). Through these political encounters on Ra`iatea, representatives empowered their shared Oceanic identities and reinforced the relationships of our kūpuna.

A more recent attempt exemplifying the struggle against colonial aggression and the need to emphasize traditional alliances can be found during the era of the Hawaiian Kingdom. Although often referred to in historical texts as a monarch “reviled and ridiculed” for various political blunders, Kalākaua, who reigned from 1874 to 1891, sought to form a Polynesian federation that would recreate previous inter-Oceanic connections (Silva 2004, 89). Concerned with dispelling the notion that the “Hawaiian nation was in serious decline,” and recognizing that other Pacific Islands had no “diplomatically recognized national entity and therefore were ripe for colonization,” Kalākaua struggled to create an internationally accepted coalition throughout Oceania (Osorio 2002, 230). Although unsuccessful, the formation of a Polynesian federation would have reasserted the strong cultural, political, and social ties that were once practiced in the region. Because Kalākaua secured only one signature, that of Malietoa of Sāmoa, and was facing threats of war and paternalistic rebukes from the “great” western powers, any prospect of his forming a Polynesian federation was forcibly subdued.

### *Deconstructing and Remodeling Inter-Oceanic Relations within a University Space*

Just as Dumont d’Urville divided Oceania into Polynesia, Micronesia, and Melanesia in the 1820s, the university is divided into multiple schools and colleges, and is further separated into individual disciplines that reflect a western perspective on teaching and learning. A space within the university must be carved out in order to deconstruct these barriers that separate scholars and students who are working toward similar goals within Oceania. The university and the scholarship that is produced within each particular school of thought are deeply implicated in this division.

The university as a colonial construct problematizes the position of Oceanic academics in various ways. Because scholarship is based on the production of research and writing—practices that have notoriously oppressed and exoticized Oceanic cultures and communities—Oceanic academics must be wary of the tendency to “reinforce and maintain a style of discourse that is never innocent” in its subjugation of native peoples (Smith 2002, 36). Recognition of intellectual aptitude is dependent on the Oceanic scholar’s ability to “appropriate the language of the colonizer,” which in turn must be used to elucidate the struggles of the colonized (Smith 2002, 36). This proves a difficult venture for Oceanic scholars attempting to liberate their communities from colonial conceptualizations and constraints. Polarizing discourses framing the relationship between indigenous cultures and the university often place Oceanic scholars on opposite shores, or—as Gloria Anzaldua asserted in reference to a *mestiza* positioning—opposite riverbanks. She suggested that this oppositional arrangement is not enough for indigenous scholars, that a “counterstance locks one into a duel of oppressor and oppressed,” and therefore “both are reduced to a common denominator of violence” (Anzaldua 1987, 78). Ultimately, in order to resist this violence, Oceanic scholars must “decide to act and not react” (Anzaldua 1987, 79).

This “decision to act” has been manifested in various struggles across the UHM campus that assert the need for areas of study focusing on Hawai`i and the broader islands of Oceania. For example, Dr. Haunani-Kay Trask, former director of the Center for Hawaiian Studies, engaged in a political struggle with the State of Hawai`i to create a Hawaiian space of learning. Today we have the Kamakakūokalani Center for Hawaiian Studies, a space that encourages students in the program to speak from two cultural worlds within the confines of a western institution. This further enables Kānaka Maoli to participate in academia by way of Hawaiian epistemological “thought worlds” and has increased native Hawaiian enrollment and scholarship at UH Mānoa. A space also must be created for students and academics from across Oceania to generate scholarship through collaboration and exchange from culturally grounded vantage points.

Perspectives on the relationship between space and time are pertinent to the establishment of an Oceanic place of engagement at UH Mānoa. “Space is often viewed in Western thought worlds as being static or divorced from time . . . this is particularly

relevant to colonialism” (Smith 2002, 52). In various Oceanic epistemologies, space and time are inseparable concepts. Linda Tuhiwai Smith, for example, has noted that “the [indigenous] language makes no clear or absolute distinction between the two: the Maori word for time or space is the same” (2002, 50). Oceanic perspectives include spatial and temporal concepts. However, they are not represented as separate and individual experiences; rather, they are encountered together.

By acknowledging that western spatial and temporal constructs shape the university, Oceanic peoples can form interstices for the restoration of inter-Oceanic relationships. However, these “spaces of resistance and hope” must be re-modeled after native understandings, priorities, and needs (Smith 2002, 4). Oceanic students currently lack meaningful encounters with each other in their academic experiences that can help formulate and restore former political connections throughout the region. This includes students within the Indigenous Politics, Hawaiian studies, Pacific languages, and Pacific Islands studies programs. In addition, Oceanic students outside these disciplines may have virtually no opportunities for consequential exchanges with their counterparts from other areas of the Pacific. The compartmentalization into separate spaces promotes the colonial ideology of “divide and conquer,” effectively contributing to the disconnection between students.

Moreover, dominant conceptions of land continue to generate conflicting spatial discourses serving to further alienate Oceanic students from the university and each other. In Oceania, land has always bound familial relationships, whereas in the West, “land . . . was viewed as something to be tamed and brought under control. The landscape could be rearranged of nature, could be altered by ‘Man’: swamps could be drained, waterways diverted, inshore areas filled, not simply for physical survival, but for further exploitation of the environment or making it ‘more pleasing’ aesthetically” (Smith 2002, 51). Likewise, UH Mānoa expresses no significant genealogical relation to the land on which it is situated, disconnecting its spatiotemporal and, thus, cultural connection and purpose as a place of learning. Ku`ualoha Ho`omanawanui has expressed this relationship difference in this way: “Western science teaches that the formation of the earth and the evolution of humans were separate occurrences, while the Kumulipo, a foundational Hawaiian creation epic, recounts the birth of the universe, earth and all living creatures,

including Kānaka Maoli, who are thus genealogically related to the land” (2004, 88). This genealogical connection denotes an important relationship between Oceanic peoples and the space we occupy. The university is structured in a manner that separates time, space, land, and peoples into various categories.

### *Final Words*

The languages of Oceania share many of the same sounds and vocabulary. In addition to embodied and material exchanges, these similarities enabled communication and understanding between the island groups and facilitated social, intellectual, spiritual, economic, and political pursuits. The strength of inter-Oceanic relationships, founded on centuries of encounters, has been eroded by the imposition of colonial languages and this is an additional barrier that Oceanic scholars must overcome. Oral and material exchanges were the principal mode of transporting knowledge and histories among Oceanic communities. In place of our native languages, inter-Oceanic encounters now utilize the languages of our respective colonizers as primary methods of communication in academia. Despite this disconnect, writer Ngugi Wa Thiong’o has asserted that “the classes fighting against imperialism . . . have to speak the united language of struggle contained in each of their languages” (1997, 3). Using the language of struggle intertwined with Oceanic epistemologies, discussions of the broad issues facing Oceanic peoples can be productive. In the university, oration as a resource has no defined space (unlike published text) and therefore it is not always considered credible. By re-inscribing the value of oral exchanges between Oceanic peoples and empowering Oceanic voices, our histories can be spoken, understood, developed, and exchanged within the university.

Our encounters at the university parallel our political struggles, projecting the separation that has molded our identities as colonized peoples. However, the university can also act as common ground providing endless possibilities for envisioning a new space for inter-Oceanic encounters to commence. Adopting a heightened consciousness throughout the disciplines and focusing on Oceanic issues will hopefully result in the recognition that Pacific peoples continue to share commonalities.

LU`UKIA ARCHER has a BA in political science and Hawaiian studies from the University of Hawai`i at Mānoa. She is completing an MA in political science (in the Indigenous Politics Program) and is applying to the doctoral program. She currently works at the Center for Hawaiian Studies with the Kia`i `Āina/Ceded Lands Inventory Project.

U`I KELI`IKULI has a BA in Hawaiian language and Hawaiian studies. She is completing an MA in political science (in the Indigenous Politics Program) and is applying to the doctoral program. She currently works at the Center for Hawaiian Studies with the Kia`i `Āina/Ceded Lands Inventory Project.

MALIA KA`AIHUE has a BA in Hawaiian language and Hawaiian studies and an MA in political science. She is a doctoral student in political science and also works at the Center for Hawaiian Studies with the Kia`i `Āina /Ceded Lands Inventory Project.

### References

Anzaldua, Gloria

- 1987 *Borderlands / La Frontera: The New Mestiza*. San Francisco: Aunt Lute books.

Emerson, Nathaniel B

- 1997 *Pele and Hiiaka: A Myth From Hawaii*. Revised edition. Honolulu: 'Ai Pōhaku Press. Originally published by Honolulu Star-Bulletin Ltd, 1915.

Gegeo, David Welchman

- 2001 Cultural Rupture and Indigeneity: The Challenge of (Re)visioning "Place" in the Pacific. *The Contemporary Pacific* 13:491–507.

Ho`omanawanui, Ku`ualoha

- 2004 He Mana, Leo (Breath, Spirit, Voice): Kanaka Maoli Empowerment through Literature. *The American Indian Quarterly* 28 (1/2 [Winter/Spring]): 86–91.

Kame`eleihiwa, Lilikalā

- 1992 *Native Land and Foreign Desires: Pehea Lā E Pono Ai?* Honolulu: Bishop Museum Press.

Longstaff, Daniel (Taniera)

- 1999 Sacred Birds of Land and Sky. *Ko E Talanoa, Tales and Stories of the South Pacific: Tahiti*. Online at (<http://www.tongatapu.net.to/lore/tahiti/tahiti001.htm>) [accessed 13 Dec 2004]

Osorio, Jonathan Kay Kamakawiwo`ole

- 2002 *Dismembering Lāhui: A History of the Hawaiian Nation to 1887*. Honolulu: University of Hawai`i Press.

Silva, Noenoe

2004 *Aloha Betrayed: Native Hawaiian Resistance to American Colonialism*.  
Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

Smith, Linda Tuhiwai

2002 *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples*. Dunedin, NZ:  
University of Otago Press.

Wa Thiong'o, Ngugi

1997 *Decolonising the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature*.  
Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

## *Revisiting the “Pasifika Way” for a New School of Pasifika Education*

Tanya Wendt Samu

*One of the key questions posed for this collection was: What does it mean “to be a part of an imagined Pacific community, given our specific [and diverse] histories and contemporary experiences”? This question has been rephrased and applied to a specific context, and specific profession for this paper. The context is the largest university within New Zealand, located in the so-called largest Polynesian city in the world: Auckland.*

---

Whatever you do, remember you represent three things—  
your name, your family and your people.

*Samoan grandmother to her grandson, USA (1994)*

I am many things, to many different groups of people. I am a daughter, a wife, a mother . . . I am a teacher, a lecturer, a researcher . . . but one thing that I am *not* is an individual—and I accept this. I stand with a host of people behind me.

I am Tanya Wendt Samu—and I am mindful that I must *always* represent myself as a member of two different sets of Samoan families (the one I was born into and the one I married into). Here in Aotearoa/New Zealand, I also represent my varied professional roles as a Pacific educator, academic, and emerging researcher. In these roles I am often *required* to represent and to advocate for our Pasifika people. I am not the only Pacific person with such employment-based expectations—I belong to a team of Pacific educators and emerging academics. *We* represent our people in a unique setting and in a unique way.

So the invitation to submit a paper that engages a “constructive conversation” about what it means to be part of this “imagined community” of Pacific peoples was impossible to resist. It has come at a time when such a critical conversation is just beginning among the Pacific staff of the academic institution in which I am located. For



me, right now, this is not a conversation about personal interactions and relationships. I have rephrased the question and applied it to interactions and relationships within a specific professional and academic context.

The rephrased question is: Given the diverse yet similar realities of Pacific peoples in New Zealand, as well as within the education sector, what does it mean to be a part of a Pacific community of university educators and researchers that is striving to both lead and contribute to the development of Pacific people within our urban region and our nation of residency?

Allow me to set the scene in terms of the national education policy and institution-based strategic planning that we as Pacific educators work within. This will enable me to focus more precisely on the aforementioned critical conversation.

#### PART ONE: SETTING THE SCENE

##### *What is Pasifika Education?*

In the context of New Zealand, “Pacific education” simply refers to the education and development of people of Pacific cultural heritage and descent who reside in New Zealand. Over the past two to three decades, the formal names or labels that institutions and government organizations such as the Ministry of Education have applied to this multiethnic minority group have ranged from “Pacific Islanders,” “Pacific Islands,” or “Pacific Nations,” to, more recently, “Pasifika.” Educational institutions use the term “Pasifika” because that is the translation of “Pacific” in several of the Pacific languages spoken in this nation.

The fact that the term “Pasifika” superficially (even cosmetically) originates from within this multiethnic grouping is of no small consequence, because being able to define ourselves is an issue of control. This is a strong argument that Kaupapa Māori theorists such as Linda Tuhiwai Smith have presented (1998):<sup>1</sup> When the power to define and give meaning is in the hands of others (and not in the hands of indigenous peoples), then a group has lost power and control over their own constructions.

Pacific educators have been well aware of the homogenizing effect such collectivizing terms have for Pacific peoples, and they have been directing their non-

Pacific colleagues' attention to this issue for many years. As Diane Mara, Lita Foliaki, and Eve Coxon stated:

It is important to keep in mind that "Pacific Islander" is a blanket term used in metropolitan countries like New Zealand to identify people from a number of different Pacific Island countries (and their New Zealand-born descendants). Its use conceals and undermines the historical, social, political and cultural uniqueness of each Pacific Islands society. (1994, 181)

The New Zealand Ministry of Education (MOE) now does more than keep this in mind; the recognition of intra-group diversities is becoming quite embedded in its rhetoric. For example:

Teaching needs to be responsive to the diversity and the diverse realities within groups, for example, diversity within Pakeha, Māori, Pasifika (the Pasifika "umbrella") and Asian students who are arguably the most diverse "ethnic" group categories by cultural and linguistic heritage. (MOE 2004, 21)

#### *Pasifika as a National and Institutional Strategic Education Priority*

The current policy environment in Aotearoa/New Zealand is very favorable for Pasifika education. The Ministry of Education has stated that Pasifika education is "a priority area of work for government and the Ministry," because "Pasifika peoples require specifically tailored approaches to education policy and initiatives" (MOE 2005). Three key policy statements shape the ministry's work in Pasifika education:

(a) *The Pasifika Education Plan* (MOE 2003). This covers all the sectors (early childhood, primary, secondary, tertiary) and provides strategic direction for Pasifika education in New Zealand. The purpose of this plan is "to increase Pasifika achievement in all areas of education through increasing participation, improving retention and focusing on effective teaching strategies in early literacy and numeracy" (MOE 2005).

(b) *The Tertiary Education Strategy* is made up of six specific overall strategies. Strategy Five is “Educate for Pacific Peoples’ Inclusion and Development.” According to the Tertiary Education Commission, “Developments in this area are critical to New Zealand’s future development, as Pacific peoples as a group will provide a significant contribution to our economy and society. . . . it will be important to further develop partnerships between tertiary system providers, agencies and Pacific peoples” (MOE 2002, 19).

(c) *The Government’s Education Priorities* were outlined in a statement made by the minister of education in May 2003 (Mallard 2003). The government’s overall goals for the New Zealand education system are:

- To build an education system that equips New Zealanders with twenty-first century skills
- To reduce systematic underachievement in education

In terms of the second overall goal, four priority groups of learners were identified: Māori, Pasifika, those subject to poverty, and learners with special needs/disabilities. The minister stated, “The system does not yet work well enough for many of these learners” (Mallard 2003, 3).

An important driver of this strategic and targeted focus on Pacific people and education is the demographic projections. According to the last census (Statistics New Zealand 2001), 6.5 percent of New Zealand’s population identified as Pasifika. More than half of Pasifika are New Zealand-born. Pasifika as a multiethnic group has a very youthful and rapidly growing population.

By 2021, the Pasifika population is projected to increase by over 50 percent, to 414,000. They will make up 9.2 percent of New Zealand’s population. Pasifika children currently make up 11 percent of the New Zealand children; this is projected to increase to 17 percent in 2021. Given that 60 percent of Pasifika peoples live in the Auckland region, the impact on early childhood centers and schools will be immense.

The cultures and languages of Pasifika people may be unique and different from one another, but socioeconomic disparities are the real similarities among Pasifika peoples, as a multiethnic group within New Zealand society. The achievement of the first overall goal of the national education system (equipping New Zealanders with twenty-first century skills) will be hindered if the “tail end” of its population, that is, the lower socioeconomic sector, grows larger and browner. This would be a real risk if the second overall goal of the national education system (reducing systematic underachievement) is not achieved.

*A New Faculty of Education—With Aspirations in Pasifika Education*

I am an academic staff member of the new Faculty of Education at the University of Auckland. This faculty is based on the amalgamation of the Auckland College of Education (ACE) with the University of Auckland’s School of Education, which formally occurred during ceremonies held in September 2004.

The new faculty’s vision and goals are articulated in the business and academic case that was prepared in 2003 and presented to the councils of both institutions in 2004. After formal permission to proceed was granted, the case was submitted to the government of New Zealand for final approval. The vision of the amalgamation is:

To be recognised nationally and internationally as New Zealand’s leading provider of professional education and educational research through excellent programmes of teaching and research that are inclusive, innovative and outcome focused and that advance educational knowledge, improve educational practice and support communities of interest.  
(University of Auckland 2004)

There are six goals, each with a set of subgoals that are intended to achieve this vision:

- Build excellent capability
- Provide leadership and innovation within the sector
- Strive constantly for increasingly effective delivery

- Constantly improve accessibility and relevance
- Contribute to Māori development aspirations
- Contribute to Pasifika inclusion and development

One of the subgoals of the first goal is to “work collaboratively and cooperatively to contribute to the delivery of the Tertiary Education Strategy and support the specific needs of Māori and Pacific people.” The sixth goal speaks for itself.

Pasifika as a multiethnic group is identified and therefore prioritized in the case for the amalgamation, reflecting the broader tertiary education policy directions of the Ministry of Education as well as the demographic features of the Auckland metropolitan region.

*A New School—To Lead Teaching, Research, and Development in Pasifika Education*

In the months that followed the amalgamation, fast-paced developments were set in motion that were intended to be fully established and operational by the start of the new academic year, in February 2006. A crucial development was the new faculty’s organizational structure. The reorganization has resulted in the establishment of seven schools: Teaching, Learning and Development; Social and Policy Studies; Science, Mathematics and Technology Education; Language, Literacies and Communication; Te Puna Wānanga (Māori Education); Visual and Creative Arts in Education; and Pasifika Education. The School of Pasifika Education is the smallest school, with fewer than twenty academic staff. But rather than creating, for example, a Centre of Pacific Education Studies within the School of Teaching and Learning, it was determined that the new faculty needed to create a structure that would “walk the talk” of the case for the amalgamation. Its small size belies the tremendous expectations the faculty has for the School of Pasifika Education’s leadership role in Pacific education and development across the faculty. One highly significant consequence is that there is now Pasifika representation at the highest level of management and decision making within the faculty.

While the numbers may be relatively small, the collective experience and expertise of the staff in teacher education, cultural knowledge, and community

networking and collaboration is immense. Before amalgamation, most of the Pasifika staff members were located in the Auckland College of Education, teaching specialized courses and programs such as Pacific Education Studies within the mainstream Bachelor of Education degree program, and the Pacific Island Early Childhood Education diploma. Under the former ACE internal structure they were members of the Faculty of Pasifika Development, with its own general manager, who represented Pacific interests. Several senior Pasifika staff achieved the status of senior lecturers and principal lecturers in the ACE career path, a reflection of their years of professional service and development.

### *A New Professional Context*

The School of Pasifika Education (SCOPE) is the strategic consolidation of the expertise and strengths in Pasifika education that already existed within the former Auckland College of Education and the University of Auckland's School of Education. It will benefit from the far more assertive and progressive developments that have occurred largely within the former ACE Pasifika Development program. However, the one overriding feature of this new school, particularly for former ACE staff, is that it is within a new *university* mega-organization, that is, the University of Auckland. And in a university, there are unique cultural features that we as new university academics have to address.

First of all, as university academics we are expected to research, write, publish, and advance our professional qualifications. What previously was encouraged is now mandatory. Quality teaching of future teachers and social workers is no longer the main measurement of performance and the primary source of peer esteem, as it was formerly in the Auckland College of Education. In terms of academic qualifications, only one person in the School of Pasifika Education holds a doctoral degree, and three hold master's degrees (with honors). Others are either in the process or on the verge of completing their master's degrees. Three (including myself) have embarked on part-time doctoral studies. Only three staff members are established, experienced researchers with publications in their names. Only one of them at this point has a Performance Based Research Fund (PBRF) ranking.<sup>2</sup> Two are hopeful about their chances to earn a PBRF ranking when they submit their research portfolios in the next review round in 2006.

Most of the SCOPE staff members are of Samoan descent, and the vast majority of the staff are female. There are two Cook Islanders and three Niue staff. Staff range in age from their mid-twenties to their early sixties. There are equal numbers of staff who are New Zealand-born and raised, and staff who migrated to New Zealand as young adults. Most see themselves as deeply rooted in the language and cultural traditions of a specific Pacific culture, but some do not have this sense, due to diverse, less traditional, or less culturally conventional upbringing. All staff, however, have strong cultural identities that draw on a specific Pacific heritage, as well as the socially constructed (and somewhat taken-for-granted) collective Pasifika identity.

## PART TWO: A CRITICAL CONVERSATION

### *Conceptualising “Pasifika” in the New Context*

The establishment of the School of Pasifika Education is a very exciting development, but also rather daunting for me, given that I was appointed to be the first Head of School of Pasifika Education, commencing January 2006. In the flurry—no, the whirlwind—of issues that had to be addressed before the end of 2005, a colleague employed a commonly used term during a management meeting. Perhaps organizational whirlwinds of this kind create perceptual spaces that make the “norm” perplexing—but I left the meeting mentally “stuck” on the term she used. I had to give it some careful consideration. The term was “Pasifika.”

I sometimes hear my Pasifika colleagues make reference to “Pasifika” when they describe, for example, the relative merits of a faculty process or procedure. If the said process is congruent to the speaker’s cultural values, the speaker will often say, “That is Pasifika—the Pasifika way.” If the underlying values do not appear to be congruent, the comment might be, instead, “That is not Pasifika.” This almost taken-for-granted assumption of a unifying set of shared values and expectations among our Pasifika staff bears a very strong resemblance to the way the phrase “the Pacific Way” is used within regional organizations and settings in the Pacific. I thought it might be useful to briefly examine the origins of this other phrase and relate it to the term “Pasifika” and its informal use in our new school, on our campus, and perhaps elsewhere.

According to Ron Crocombe (1976), the phrase “the Pacific Way” was first “launched on the international stage” in 1970 by then prime minister of Fiji, Sir Ratu Kamasese Mara, in an address to the United Nations. Crocombe speculated that this phrase has come to be widely used because “it satisfies both psychological and political needs, in that it helps to fulfil a growing demand for respected Pacific-wide identifying symbols and for Pacific unity” (1976, 1). The phrase itself is not intended to imply homogeneity—the diverse Pacific nations and peoples that fall under its banner are *not* all the same. The phrase was developed and has been used within the region in those instances and occasions when “the common interests of all the islands peoples can be served by collaboration” (Crocombe 1976, 1). Sometimes the main advantage of a unifying concept is its usefulness in countering forces such as neocolonialism—or, for migrant community groups such as Pasifika in New Zealand, countering forces such as assimilation and social/economic/cultural marginalization.

The Pasifika organizational entity that existed in the former Auckland College of Education reflected Crocombe’s speculations. Carving a recognized institutional space for Pacific people via an umbrella term was a collaborative exercise that was intended to serve the common interests of different Pacific student teachers, the wider educational and development needs of the various Pacific communities of Auckland, and the need to prepare mainstream student teachers for the Pacific students they might teach. Pacific staff members who had served the longest within the former college can testify to the struggles they endured and the resistance they encountered in their efforts to include Pacific-specific content in courses and programs, and to provide Pacific-specific student support. Not all staff members in the wider college were supportive of initiatives that appeared to favor the needs of one group over others.

The aforementioned historical developments spanned a period of seventeen years. The Auckland College of Education started in 1987 with one lecturer on a fixed-term contract; in 2004 it had lecturers, senior lecturers, and principal lecturers as permanent staff. Whether as Pacific Islanders, Pacific Island Nations, or now Pasifika Education, this particular community of educators developed a very strong, passionate identity and voice within the former college. Identifying symbols of Pacific unity included a physical space called the Kainga Fale Pasifika, a building with offices, student common room, and



teaching classroom. Other unifying symbols included protocols and practices, such as saying prayers at the beginning of meetings in a Pacific mother tongue, and beginning formal presentations with the language greetings of at least six different Pacific cultural groups. Gatherings (including meetings) organized and hosted by Pasifika staff were generously catered, and life events experienced by staff and students (such as the death of a close relation) were actively respected in “our Pacific way” and according to “our Pacific protocols.”

However, whether it is the “Pacific Way” or Pasifika (a yet-to-be-clarified unifying concept within the School of Pasifika Education), it is important to recognize that these are still social constructions, and as such, open to new articulations. Crocombe described the “Pacific Way” as being organic: a “living, growing field of meaning”—open to change, modification and amendment. He described the concept as fluid—having “soul—with room to manoeuvre” (1976, 3). Embedded within the concept of the Pacific way is a notion of kinship between Pacific peoples, who subscribe to the concept within certain contexts and situations—an ideological sense of sisterhood and brotherhood and family, at the interface between the collective “us” and “them”—“them” being the institutions, policies, and processes that threaten to subsume, inhibit, change, or take away our ability to shape and determine our own destinies.

Although it has been almost thirty years since Crocombe penned and published his reflections on the genesis of the “Pacific Way,” his views regarding the socially constructed nature of the concept as it was used then in the Pacific Region still resonate with me and have set off a series of reflective questions. For example:

- What *are* our underlying assumptions when we use the term “Pasifika”?
- Is it possible that the underlying assumptions have become rather fixed and even inflexible? For instance, are we as staff ever guilty, on occasion, of being inflexible as to what counts and who counts (and is therefore legitimate) as Pasifika?
- Have we become somewhat complacent and set in our thinking in the way we see Pasifika education and ourselves as Pasifika educators? In the former Auckland College of Education, much was accomplished to

establish Pasifika education as a highly legitimate and credible cross-discipline in the official consciousness of the overall organization. Should we assume that this will continue now that we are a university faculty?

- Following from that, part of a university culture is the expectation of freedom of expression, and a free and frank exchange of viewpoints. How will we respond if, at worst, colleagues challenge our legitimacy, our professional credibility, and perhaps even our very existence?
- We have a lot to live up to and to continue to prove. I anticipate unique oppositional forces—are we prepared to become more politicized?

I would like to think of the term *Pasifika* as being organic—and open to new articulations. As Pasifika educators in the faculty, and being acutely aware of the overall policy context in which our work is situated, we certainly have the drive and the commitment. We are undoubtedly passionate about serving our peoples. I do appreciate Crocombe's admonition that we must have "room to manoeuvre," to adapt and to change if need be, particularly in our thinking. I have been wondering if perhaps there is an "old way" of thinking about being Pasifika and carrying out our work as Pasifika educators—and if inherent in that way there may be habits of mind and practice that require rejuvenating, for greater relevancy to the new academic university context we are now in.

We do need such a unifying concept as Pasifika within the School of Pasifika Education. But we need to revisit it and conceptualize it, because there may be underlying assumptions in the way it is currently used. As a staff, it is possible that the more significant points of difference within our socially constructed professional organization are not so much cultural but ideological and related to our professional practice.

## CONCLUSION

My younger sister, inspired by our mother's craftwork, has developed a metaphor of patchwork and patchwork quilting to communicate her views of identity and representation. At a writer's conference held in April 2005 at the National University of

Samoa, she used the patchwork metaphor to articulate her views regarding the credibility of her voice via her writing. She stated:

The beauty of a quilt lies not in its individual pieces, but in the sum total of its parts, as something totally new and different is created from a jumbled selection of patches of fabric.

Then, referring to herself, she continued:

I am something new and different—made up of lots of different cultural pieces. People like me are the future and the now because we take all the bits and pieces, and the contradictions that we are, and we create “new” works of art. Does that mean we are any less Samoan or Pacific or Polynesian? (Young 2005)

Let me also draw on this patchwork metaphor in terms of collective vision and response. Remember, simple patchwork requires piecing together desired, different but equal-sized patches of fabric. In the School of Pasifika Education, the perspectives, theories, beliefs, and paradigms of practice should not be dominated by those of any single ethnic or cultural group. The members of this school have different kinds of expertise and different areas of interest, and they come from different cultural and ethnic backgrounds—much like the diverse Pasifika communities that we all have a vested interest and commitment to serve.

We must build on and contextualize existing strengths. By contextualizing, I mean responding to the new organizational culture and the attendant processes and expectations that come with being a university—and not just any university, but the University of Auckland. This particular stage of our collective journey will involve clarifying and establishing a shared vision for our school; redesigning, refining, and sharing roles and responsibilities; and critically evaluating our current practices, beliefs, and values so that we can truly build a school that leads to developments in Pasifika

education within the faculty, the university, the Auckland region, Aotearoa/New Zealand, and beyond.

In other words, we can take all the bits and pieces, including the contradictions, and, building on the wonderful work that has already taken place, we will create something new that will not be any less Pasifika.

I am a senior lecturer in the Faculty of Education, University of Auckland. I lecture in Pacific education as well as diversity in education. I conduct research in the broad area of Pacific education, primarily focusing on the context of New Zealand. I serve on a number of national curriculum, research, and professional development advisory and reference groups for the New Zealand Ministry of Education. My professional experiences include education consultancy work in Sāmoa and Tonga, teaching in secondary schools in New Zealand and Sāmoa, and writing social sciences textbooks for secondary schools in New Zealand and Sāmoa. I am also a doctoral student.

#### *Notes*

1. As a term, *Kaupapa Māori* “captures Maori desires to affirm Maori cultural philosophies and practices. In short Kaupapa Maori is about being ‘fully’ Maori” (Pihama, Cram, and Walker 2002, 30).
2. The Performance Based Research Fund (PBRF) is a system to justify government funding of universities. At its most simplistic level, it assesses the research outputs of academic staff within tertiary institutions. The more staff with PBRF rankings, particularly higher rankings, the more government research grant money is allocated to that institution.

#### *References*

Alton-Lee, Adrienne

- 2003 *Quality Teaching for Diverse Students in Schooling: Best Evidence Synthesis*. Wellington: New Zealand Ministry of Education.

Mara, Diane, Lita Foloaki, and Eve Coxon

- 1994 Pacific Education. In *The Politics of Learning and Teaching in Aotearoa New Zealand*, edited by Eve Coxon, Kuni Jenkins, James Marshall, and Luran Massey. Palmerston North, NZ: Dunmore Press.

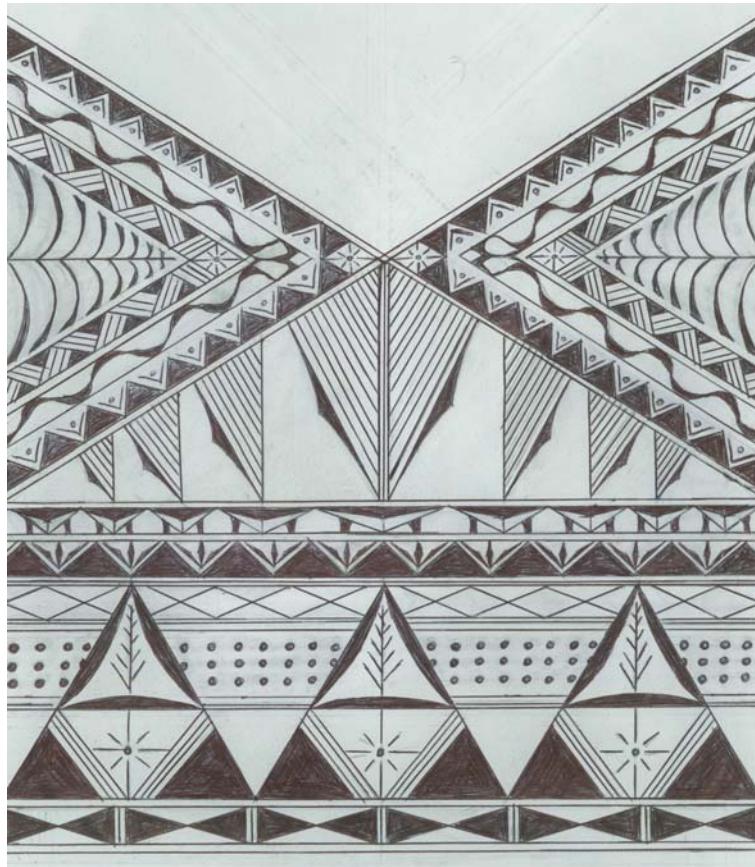
Crocombe, Ron

- 1976 *The Pacific Way: An Emerging Identity*. Suva: Lotu Pasifika Productions.

Mallard, Trevor

- 2003 *New Zealand's Education Priorities*. Wellington: New Zealand Ministry of Education.
- MOE, Ministry of Education
- 2003 *Pasifika Education Plan*. Wellington: New Zealand Ministry of Education.
- 2002 *Priorities: Interim Statement of Tertiary Education Priorities, 2002/2007*. Wellington: New Zealand Ministry of Education.
- 2004 *Guidelines for Generating a Best Evidence Synthesis Iteration*. Wellington: Iterative Best Evidence Synthesis Programme.
- 2005 *Pasifika Education Overview*. (<http://www.minedu.govt.nz>) [accessed 30 October 2005]
- Pihama, Leonie, Fiona Cram, and Sheila Walker
- 2002 *Creating Methodological Space: A Literature Review of Kaupapa Maori Research*. *Canadian Journal of Native Education* 26:30–43.
- Pouesi, Daniel
- 1994 *An Illustrated History of Samoans in California*. Carson, CA: KIN Publications.
- Smith, Linda Tuhiwai
- 1998 *Decolonising Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples*. Dunedin: University of Otago Press.
- Statistics New Zealand
- 2001 *Census of Population and Dwellings*. Wellington: Statistics New Zealand.
- University of Auckland
- 2004 *The University of Auckland and Auckland College of Education Proposed Amalgamation Public Consultation Document*. April. (<http://www.auckland.ac.nz/docs/visitors/040415%20Amalgamation%20Consultation.pdf>) [accessed 1 November 2006]
- Young, Lani Jade
- 2005 *Untitled paper presented at National University of Samoa writers conference, Apia, April*.

*Embodied Encounters*





The heels of my once proud shoes punctured rectangular wounds into the earth as I walked my evening route home through an obscure geography of gravel and marsh. With the sun still hovering above the tree line, sweat moistened my broad forehead and dampened the armpits of my mustard-colored suit. The sisal factories were screaming as usual, the machine's cries pulsating in my head as the heat so often did. I imagined demons living in the machines, screeching. A dreadful reality. Yet being a legal consultant to small businesses was not proving to be a more glamorous or noble profession than working on the mass exportation of sisal from the demon-filled factories, no matter what we were told.

On most evenings I kept my eyes low, my mind idle, and my feet on the road. Tonight, however, my eyes wandered, my mind wondered, and my feet led. The consequences were incalculable.

Here on my island, which my mother's ancestors first inhabited centuries ago, the indigenous vitie bird has forever been a beloved symbol of our island's pride and unique beauty. In our Oceanic nation, however, through the years of colonization and since our independence some thirty years ago, the vitie has somehow become the focus of our people's most practiced pastime, the patag fight. I had never actually witnessed a patag. When I was a little girl my mother would not allow me to be exposed to such violence. "It brings savages out of people," she would say.

Quite aware of my "hybrid" identity (native mother and western father—a peerless and yet almost envied image), I hesitantly approached a group of huddled backs, bobbing heads, and raised arms gathered to watch a patag. Nearing the circle, I met dark stares from dark eyes, but mine, a reluctant blue, fixed on the purples, reds, and oranges that colored the vitie's once long and elegant wings. For the patag to function as desired, the wings are clipped and taped. For the first time I wondered why the vitie were chosen as the honored species to participate in the patag. Perhaps just because they were there.



The event began. The birds were pitted against each other, and little time was lost before deliberate attacks were made by both sides. It's not that the vitie is a naturally violent animal. Its nature is quite the opposite. Looking closely, I located the peculiar contrast evident between the creatures' fierce countenance and grace. Their muscles were tense from long periods of restriction; their bodies had lost their natural sense of ease. Violence now beat through their hearts. Being incarcerated in cages for so long before being released into a patag fight, the noble creatures emerge loyal only to freedom, yet uncertain of how to ensure it.

The vitie owners shared their birds' intensity. Fanatical and stormy commands, affirmations and disappointments alternately exploded from their mouths. I watched their large, taut stomachs rise and fall, flex and then exhale with sighs as these men jockeyed about the ring. There was a sense of paternalism, even one of compassion and concern that the owners revealed for their birds. Yet the function of the game took precedence over any feelings of sentiment. They were out to win.

I edged the toe of my shoe between the legs of two different youths and slid myself through and in front of them. I intended to close in on the scene further, but I suppose my eagerness showed. Before a muscle moved, my arm was grabbed. I looked over and met a pair of hard, complex eyes, warning me to notice and adhere to the black rope lying across the dirt in front of us—the boundary line.

This was a line drawn for us onlookers, but it was also meant to restrict the vitie. Its black, thick form violently burnt the soil. So artificial and unnatural, yet I knew the rope had found a place of normalcy in the earth, having laid there for the turning of innumerable days and nights. Only the determination of will can remove such an enormous hallucination of permanency. None was evident that evening—only vehemence swirled over the rope and into the air as the birds, owners, and onlookers disturbed the turf. I muffled a cough.

“You coming home from work?” asked the woman with the complex eyes.

“Uh-huh,” I mumbled in response.

Her face held on to the infinite hours it had spent under the sun creating a beautifully rich bronze color, streaking it with a kaleidoscope of fine lines. She nodded her head once. I returned a question, “Do you live around here?”

She turned and pointed up a valley to the north. I had never imagined homes were nestled within those steep slopes of the island. “Moti Valley?” I asked.

“We farm piloku off the trees.” Piloku are the small African snails, imported by the colonial population as a delicacy, which now kill off much of the native vegetation, except for the native remuku trees in which they live. The snails continue to be a delicacy in town and are often exported as a luxury food. “It’s a good living,” she continued, “but our sons have left for the sea.”

She seemed saddened, so I offered, “The sea is not far from the valley. They still must come to visit often.”

“Yes, they do,” she said more optimistically. Smiling, she added, “They tell me that living with the sea brings them closer to our home in the valley.” She looked down at my shoes and asked, “Your mother, is she local? I think I know her, she’s a Matehu?”

Technically, both my parents were “local,” having been born and raised on the island, but I knew what she meant. “Yes, my grandparents are the Matehus,” I answered. “Are we related?”

“Everyone on this island has an auntie or cousin relating them to someone else.” She flashed me a momentary smile, which I returned. My identity was wrought with barriers. To this woman, however, they seemed to be mere features. I was only half “local,” living a reality of air conditioning and faxes, never having met “the cousin” who connected me, yet this woman made the connection. Our bodies stood inches apart, our minds existed a generation away. But how far was that generation in a circular space? The sea, the valley, the black boundary line—none occupied the places on my island that I had previously imagined.

“Get him!” The woman’s fist clenched the small pandanus pouch slung across the blue and green wrap tied over her chest.

“You have money on this fight?” I inquired.

“Always behind whichever is my brother’s bird,” she pointed to the ball of earth and feathers wrestling in the ring. From behind the black barrier we all watched the vitie unleashing their venom on each other. I wanted to shout out to the birds, telling them to turn their violence on their owners—they were the enemy. I looked at the woman, enthusiastically encouraging her brother’s vitie to kill the other. The apathy that single

piece of rope created between us and those beautiful animals, our own indigenous treasures, was overpoweringly ironic.

My eyes turned upward. I saw the mountain that rose out of the water. I saw the first woman of mud. I became strangely aware of the ocean waves lapping the shores of my island, miles away. My nostrils filled with the smell of fresh blood. The violence was taking place. Somehow, sometimes, to free ourselves, we massacre each other. Other times we make connections and adapt. The routes are endless, leading us to new routes, or else, to dead-ends. To know a landscape is to know how to navigate its many pathways. This woman knew many routes lost to me, and I, new ones unknown to her.

I was at a locality that I didn't usually visit, lending a strange flavor to the rising moon. The evening had no destiny, remaining open to any outcry, or to passivity. On such nights all one can do is follow one's instincts, so I carefully slipped out of my shoes and left them empty where I had stood beside the rope. I continued down the muddy road, aware of the cheers and continuing violence behind me. But I was now more involved with the softness of my own footsteps. I walked away never knowing which bird had won the patag. It didn't matter—that wasn't the fight I was waiting for.

*In "An Oceanic Nation," I create a fictitious island that reflects what I feel is a "mixed state" of identity and landscape (or seascape) across Oceania today. Our contemporary realities are multi-sited, and they are situated above, below, and within the demon of (neo)colonialism that lingers in Oceania. In this story, the vitie bird symbolizes native pride and national autonomy, which has arguably been turned into a source of entertainment and economic opportunity. The narrator represents the younger, (half) native generation who are divided between their modern identity and a lack of knowledge about their indigenous heritage; the elder woman represents those who possess this indigenous knowledge, but who nevertheless participate in its destruction and continued incarceration (as revealed in the bird fight). In the end, the young woman realizes that pitting indigenous against indigenous is the wrong struggle, and she discovers that she has much to learn about how they are all connected and empowered as an Oceanic group.*

*This short story arose as my response to the article, "Deep Play: Notes on the Balinese Cockfight" by Clifford Geertz, which appeared in Interpretive Social Science: A*

*Second Look, edited by Paul Rabinow and William M Sullivan (1979), while I was also reading Frantz Fanon's The Wretched of the Earth (1963). The result is this short story, in which I explore the idea that while (neo)colonization has had many negative effects on Oceania, it has also created new opportunities for re-creation. The challenge is to seek out and create them for ourselves.*

My name is KARIN NA`AUALI`I ELEANOR TSUK-LING INGERSOLL and I was born on O`ahu. I attended Punahou Academy, Brown University in Rhode Island, and received a master's degree in international relations in the Political Science Department of the University of Hawai`i at Mānoa. My current research as a doctoral candidate in the Indigenous Politics Program articulates a seascape epistemology, an indigenous methodology that presumes a knowledge of the sea: the birds, colors of the clouds, shapes of the currents, limu, fish, ocean swells, and star patterns. This knowledge tells Kānaka Maoli how to move through the sea, as well as through life within a neocolonial-dominant world. My current goal is to truly understand this notion of seascape and offer it as a decolonizing epistemology for Kānaka.

*Some Place in My Body*

*because you have become Aotearoa to me*

Trisha Kehaulani Watson

I got on a plane.

I hated flying. I feared germs and heights, terrorists or random mechanical failures. I knew no one in Aotearoa. I didn't know where I was going (so much so that I didn't even realize Wellington was on the North Island of New Zealand until I opened the flight magazine).

I knew only that I had to go—that as a child, when asked if I had only one wish, I wrote neatly in my Hello Kitty journal: **"I WANT TO GO TO NEW ZELAND."**

So 20 years later, I got on a plane.

I hardly remember who I was I before I got on that plane. I remember being lost in familiar places. Noisy—inside and out. Momona, which wasn't mo' betta. I tried so hard to be here that I wasn't anywhere anymore. I tried so hard to do everything right that I did everything wrong.

I used to tell myself I was happy but I never actually felt happiness. Sometimes the enslaved are so much so as to never even know they are not free. Is this not the lesson of Plato's Cave? Freedom, friends, is relative; we learn it only by comparison and only in practice. For only those who truly know freedom can bring it to those still hunched beneath the weight of oppression. For a leader among slaves cannot truly be a leader if he himself is still a slave.

I sat in my hotel room that first day wondering if I had lost my mind. I left my son to fly to New Zealand to sit in a hotel room with nothing to do but watch *The Simpsons* and nothing to eat but Subway. I cried for an hour convinced that Pearl Harbor would surely be bombed again while I was away. As beautiful as New Zealand seemed from my hotel window, it could not calm my overwhelming sense of parental inadequacy. My Catholic upbringing kicked in—I was surely the world's worst mother.

But I now see that at that time I was not the mother my son deserved. And I now see every aboriginal child as my kuleana, my responsibility. For if those of us who have

been gifted by the gods with the capability to make life better for present and future generations do not fiercely seize our opportunities to do so, we fail all Native children—especially our own.

I aspire to nothing more in this life than to do my children proud. I dragged myself out to go to Te Papa Tongarewa (Museum of New Zealand). Wearing slippas, in the rain, I wandered through the freezing streets of Wellington. Only once inside Te Papa did I begin to notice how things were different in Aotearoa. Different for the Māori. Different because they have made it different. They have demanded it be different. Different because they understood that the colonizer will never freely give the oppressed anything. Justice for the subjugated will never come without war.

At the pōwhiri the next morning, we stood behind the kūpuna as we were welcomed outside Te Herenga Waka Marae at Victoria University. It reminded me of Kawainui Marsh, nestled in the mountains of Kailua on the island of O`ahu, only colder. Where the quiet is wet and heavy. Where the earth reaches up high above your head and makes you feel safe and small. The voices of the women that morning, calling out to us, calling out from among us, were strangely haunting—as if suspended in the air by the cold. As if welcoming not our bodies but our spirits. I remember them still.

I sat and listened to the men speak that morning, speaking only in Māori. I understood not one word, but understood them perfectly in my na`au (guts). That morning I fell in love with the ferocious life force of te reo Māori.

All around me were living, breathing Native voices; indigenous sounds. Unapologetic in their existence. Relentless in their command of our attention. And at that moment English became the most unnatural of sounds.

The `aumakua, the ancestral guardians of Hawai`i, had sent me knowing that I would be found. For in Aotearoa, where I thought I knew no one—I found I knew everyone—Cook Islanders, Samoans, Aboriginal Australians, Māori, and Native Americans. Every Native face reminded me of my own. Every story rang true. Every injury, every tale of discrimination, every wail of frustration resounded within me. My grief found a forum and comfort.

I am no longer alone in the world. Sometimes we need to go away to learn to come home.



*Photo 1. The geothermal pools at Te Puia, Rotorua, New Zealand. Photo by Trisha Kehaulani Watson.*

And the way home only appears when we are still. The `aumakua will only speak to us when we are quiet.

So now I go wherever the `aumakua send me. They have their reasons, and I have nothing to fear.

For we each have our path. We each have our place. And if we do not follow our path and do not stand strong in our place, we will not be who we are.

So in Aotearoa, where history is carved into wood and skin, I discovered that learning only begins when we have enough faith to be unafraid. For above all else, it is our fear that keeps us from freedom.

We cannot learn about the devastation of colonization through textbooks. One is only able to learn it in the faces of those who are colonized, occupied, enslaved. And only other Natives can teach us to be proud of who we are; the Natives of this life teach us how to listen to the Natives of lives passed; the Natives teach us how to fight for the

Natives of lives to come. That we are infinitely more than simply “the colonized,” “the occupied,” “the enslaved.”

That we are glorious and beautiful beyond compare because we are Native.

It is only from other Natives than I can truly learn who I am. We are liberated by the ties that bind us to one another. Our shared histories. Our shared genealogies. Our shared colonial violences. Our shared struggles.

I learned much from Natives in Aotearoa.

I learned that beautiful women wear moko.

I learned that Hawaiians drink hard, but the Māori drink harder.

I learned that we feel some people before we see them.

I believe that what happened to me in Aotearoa was not learning, but remembering. Remembering things I have always known, some place in my body. Knowing things only I, a descendant of 40,000 generations of Hawaiians, can know. Native truths. Ancestral knowledges. Indigenous epistemologies.

More than anything—I learned I have much to learn.

I look forward to getting on many more planes.



*Photo 2. The author and her son at the beach on the island of Oʻahu, near Kalaeloa. Photo by David Perreira.*



TRISHA KEHAULANI WATSON is from O`ahu. She is a lecturer in Hawaiian history at the University of Hawai`i, Mānoa, where she also works at the Kamakakūokalani Center for Hawaiian Studies. She is currently a post–Juris Doctor (JD) Fellow at the Center for Excellence in Native Hawaiian Law at the William S. Richardson School of Law. She received her JD degree in 2003 and is currently completing her PhD.

## *Breaking Skin*

Terri Janke

“Sticks and stones will break my bones,  
but names will never hurt me.”

My feet are on fire. The tar at the edges of the bitumen road is soft. Grit sticks to my toes, but I don't stop. I keep running. I turn into Spencer Street. The bag of groceries slaps against my legs. I move past the wooden houses on our street. The letterboxes fly by. I soar past a barking dog. Mrs. Francis is moving the sprinkler from the middle of her lawn to the marigold patch. I am gone before she looks up. I am whizzing past Mr. Buchan's shed. He is making a fence. His hammering sounds fade. When I reach our front yard I slow down, and then shift into a fast walk. I don't stop until I am inside the flyscreen door.

“What took you so long?” Mum says.

“Nothing,” I tell her as I put the loaf of bread and can of corned meat on the kitchen table. “If I had a bike I'd be faster. It's not fair. All the other kids have bikes.”

“Wash your hands and do the onions.” Mum opens the canned meat.

I peel away the onion's outer brown skin. My eyes sting.

---

The world is not a fair place. Why don't I have a bike? My brother has a dragster that was given to him by his godfather. My sister has a maroon bike that was given to her by an older cousin. I ride my sister's bike sometimes, when she's not around. She gets real mad if she finds out.

---

Dad comes home in the afternoon with a battered-up bike. The wheels are wonky and the paint is peeling off.

“Here, this is for you,” he tells me.

“But it’s old and rusty,” I say.

“Yeah, I know, I found it at the dump.” He is always picking up things at the local dump. He spends hours looking at other people’s garbage. Of course, he is going to make them as good as new. We have a shed full of other people’s bits of wood and clapped-out appliances. There is no room to swing a hula hoop in between the broken radios, shelves, and crates that are falling apart. “You never know when they will come in handy,” he will say.

Dad strokes the frame of the bike. “Don’t worry, I’ll fix it good as new with a coat of paint.”

I point to the ailing saddle. “The seat’s broken.”

He shakes his head once. “I’ll get a new one. Just you wait and see, it will look like it came brand-new from the shop.”

Something in my face must show I have my doubts. Dad lays the bike down and crouches down to my level.

“I used to have a red bike when I was a kid, rode it everywhere, long distances, too. I rode all day, on the railway tracks, off the cliff into the Babinda Creek, right into the water.”

I laugh. “You’re a real doogie.”

“Every kid must have a bike,” he pats my head. “We’ll make it so you are proud of it.”

“Thanks, Dad.”

That weekend we paint the bicycle blue, the color of the midday sky. After the paint dries, Dad screws on the new seat. Later, I ride down the street. I ride it to the shops, to the park, and over to my cousin’s house and back home again.

---

My sister is ten and she is having a party. The house is filled with party food, disco music, and streamers everywhere. Girls arrive with prettily wrapped presents.

“I’m just going for a quick ride on the bike,” I say. I push my bike out of the driveway. Slowly, I head up the path to the top of the hill. I like riding up a hill and sailing back down again, real fast, without having to pedal. The slope is slow at first, and

then as I go down, it gets steeper and I pick up speed on the way. Just up and back once more, I say to myself. Then I'll go back to the party.

A boy in a yellow T-shirt appears over the top of the hill. I can see his is a racing bike and even from this distance I can tell it's one of those bikes with the fancy gears and brakes fitted onto the handlebars. I recognize him straight away. He is a big boy who goes to the high school across the main street. And he is coming toward me at a cracking pace, so fast I have to brake suddenly to miss crashing into him.

"Watch it," he hisses, "Black Buddha." I look at his tight mouth and the pimples on his chin. I want to ask him what a Buddha is, but I am too scared. He blocks the path and will not let me pass.

"What a stupid old bike!" he says. I edge my way around and in front of him. Then, I imagine I am flying and make my feet churn round and round on the pedals. The trees are going by fast, then they're just a green blur. One split second later, I am lying on my back. I have hit an open concrete drain. I want to get up. My body hurts.

The boy catches up with me. He looks at my arm. His nose twists like a rat's.

"Your bone is poking through, it's so white and your skin's so black," he says. I begin to cry. I can't move and I won't ask him for help. He snorts, says something I can't quite hear and leaves.

Several minutes later, I hear my mother's voice.

"Oh my God, I hope it's not broken."

She helps me up and walks me back to our house, holding my arm close to my chest. Red blood has soaked my scratch-and-sniff apple T-shirt. Dad drives me to the hospital. Along the way he sees one of his mates walking on the side of the road.

"Need a lift?" he asks.

"Yes." His mate hops in the car, next to me.

"I'm taking my daughter to the hospital," says Dad.

Dad's friend is well mannered. He doesn't say anything about the blood he can see all over me, all over the car.

We drop Dad's friend at his house and then drive on to the hospital.

I sit holding my arm close to my body while Dad fills in the forms. The doctor explains that he has to pull my arm so that the bone will pop back in. Dad comforts me by

telling me jokes. I laugh, but he's not really funny. My laughter encourages him to say more. The stitches are big and the white plaster is bloody, even before I get home. The party is over. Mum has saved me a piece of cake. I am so hungry, but I can't eat properly with my left hand.

Mum has dragged the bike home. The steering is out of whack. I stand with the bike propped against my side. To go straight I have to turn the wheel to the right.

For twelve weeks I wear the cast of plaster. It is replaced twice and the kids at school write their names on it. When the plaster comes off, my arm has a scar and it shines like a two-cent piece.

"Do you wanna come for a ride?" my sister asks.

I shrug my shoulders. "My bike's totally broken," I say.

But it doesn't matter anyway. I never want to ride a bike again.

---

"Happy tenth birthday!" Mum says. "Close your eyes." She leads me to the garage.

"Okay." She turns me around.

I can open my eyes now. My father is standing next to a dragster with a sparkly pink seat and a shiny bell. "This has got to be the snazziest bike in the whole neighborhood. What do you reckon?" says my father.

My feet don't move.

"Have a go," urges Dad.

My mouth drops.

"What's wrong?" says Mum.

I hold up my arm and point to the shiny two-cent skin.

"The doctor says I'll always have this scar."

My mother's hands reach for my shoulder. "That scar on your arm will make you strong. Strong enough to heal the scars you can't see."

I wriggle away from her.

"What's that supposed to mean?"

"You've got to get back on the bike. It's time you started riding again," she says.

Dad helps me onto the smooth seat. My feet grip the pedals. The handlebars are in just the right position. I ride out into the world. The bell tinkles. If skin could speak, my skin would sing.

TERRI JANKE is an Indigenous, Sydney-based lawyer. She is a descendant of the Meriam people in the Torres Strait Islands and the Wuthathi clan from Cape York Peninsula. Her law practice focuses on Indigenous arts, copyright, and intellectual and cultural property rights. Terri's short stories have been published in *Southerly*, *Meanjin*, and *Island*. She and her daughter Tamina Pitt have co-authored a picture storybook for children, which was published by Magabala Books in 2004. Terri's first novel, *Butterfly Song*, was published by Penguin in February 2005. She has a forthcoming book entitled *Looking Out for Culture*, which pulls together materials from her introductory workshops to Indigenous arts, copyright, trademarks, and designs.



### Previous Titles in the CPIS Occasional Papers Series

- 1 Bieber, Patricia, translator  
1973 *Considerations of the Rights of Spain over the Caroline Islands.*
- 2 Morris, Nancy Jane, Verna H F Young, Kehau Kahapea, and Velda Yamanaka, compilers  
1974 *Bibliography of Hawaiian Language Materials at the University of Hawaii, Manoa Campus.*
- 3 Wiswell, Ella, translator  
1974 *Chapters on Hawaii and the Marianas in V. M. Golovnin's Voyage Around the World.*
- 4 Turnbull, Phyllis  
1974 *Pacific-Related Audiovisual Materials for Secondary Schools.*
- 5 Mason, Leonard, coordinator  
1974 *Pacific Islands Workshop for College Librarians in Hawaii, April 1974.*
- 6 Polansky, Patricia  
1974 *Russian Writings on the South Pacific: A Preliminary Edition.*
- 7 Mason, Leonard, coordinator  
1974 *Pacific Islands Workshop for Secondary Librarians and Social Studies Teachers in Hawaii, June 13–14, 1974.*
- 8 Packard, Jerry C  
1975 *The Bougainville Taro Blight.*
- 9 Coppel, William G  
1975 *Bibliographies of the Kermadec Islands, Niue, Swains Island and the Tokelau Islands.*
- 10 Bruce, Lesley, Patricia Schattenburg, and Patricia Price Beggerly  
1976 *Micronesian and Polynesian Voyaging: Three Readings.*
- 11 Coppel, William G  
1977 *A World Catalogue of Theses and Dissertations Concerning the Education of the Peoples of the Pacific Islands (Including the New Zealand Maori).*
- 12 Fristoe, Ashby J  
1977 *The Samoan Archives: An Annotated List of the Archival Material of the Various Governments of Western Samoa from the Middle of the Nineteenth Century to the First Quarter of the Twentieth Century.*
- 13 Hill, Harry Burnette  
1978 *The Use of Nearshore Marine Life as a Food Resource by American Samoans.*
- 14 Hurd, Jane N, and Michiko Kodama, editors  
1978 *Captain Cook and the Pacific Islands Studies Conference.*
- 15 Takeuchi, Floyd K  
1979 *A Status Study of Commercial Cinema in the Pacific Islands.*



- 16 Hurd, Jane N, editor  
1979 *The Emerging Pacific Island States: The Proceedings of the Fourth Annual Pacific Islands Studies Conference.*
- 17 Shuster, Donald R  
1979 *Urbanization in the Pacific: A Tentative Survey.*
- 18 Herr, Richard A  
1980 *Institutional Sources of Stress in Pacific Regionalism.*
- 19 Knudsen, Karen, editor  
1981 *Hawaii and the Contemporary Pacific: The Proceedings of the Sixth Annual Pacific Islands Studies Conference, 1981.*
- 20 Oliver, Douglas  
1981 *Aspects of Modernization in Bougainville, Papua New Guinea.*
- 21 Hezel, Francis X  
1982 *Reflections on Micronesia: Collected Papers.*
- 22 Levine, Stephen  
1983 *Pacific Power Maps: An Analysis of the Constitutions of Pacific Island Polities.*
- 23 Farrell, Bryan H, D Reid Ross, L Baird Evans, and D Weertz, compilers  
1983 *Tourism in the Pacific: A Bibliography.*
- 24 Lynch, C J  
1984 *Traditional Leadership in the Constitution of the Marshall Islands.*
- 25 Hezel, Francis X, Donald H Rubinstein, and Geoffrey M White, editors  
1985 *Culture, Youth and Suicide in the Pacific: Papers from an East-West Center Conference.*
- 26 Premdas, Ralph R, and Jeffrey S Steeves  
1985 *The Solomon Islands: An Experiment in Decentralization.*
- 27 Kiste, Robert C, and Richard A Herr, editors  
1985 *The Pacific and the Year 2000: Seminar Papers.*
- 28 Knudsen, Karen, editor  
1985 *History of the Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands: Proceedings of the Ninth Annual Pacific Islands Conference.*
- 29 Dubsky, Roman  
1986 *The Organization of Development Planning in the South Pacific.*
- 30 Hamnett, Judith D  
1986 *Guide to Films about the Pacific Islands.*
- 31 Lal, Brij V, compiler  
1987 *Wansalawara: Soundings in Melanesian History.*
- 32 Quigg, Agnes  
1987 *History of the Pacific Islands Studies Program at the University of Hawaii, 1950–1986.*

- 33 Stepien, Edward R  
1988 *Ni'ihau: A Brief History, parts 1 and 2.*
- 34 Miller, Melissa C, editor  
1989 *Moving Images of the Pacific Islands: A Catalogue of Films and Videos.*
- 35 Petersen, Glenn  
1990 *Lost in the Weeds: Theme and Variation in Pohnpei Political Mythology.*
- 36 White, Geoffrey M, editor  
1991 *Remembering the Pacific War.*
- 37 Furuhashi, Lynette, compiler  
1994 *Pacific Islands Dissertations and Theses from the University of Hawai'i, 1923–1990, with 1991–1993 Supplement.*
- 38 Aoki, Diane, editor  
1994 *Moving Images of the Pacific Islands: A Guide to Films and Videos.*
- 39 Furuhashi, Lynette, compiler  
1997 *Pacific Islands Dissertations and Theses from the University of Hawai'i, 1923–1996.*
- 40 Connell, John, and John P Lea  
1998 *Island Towns: Managing Urbanization in Micronesia.*
- 41 Mawyer, Alexander, compiler  
1998 *Moving Images of the Pacific Islands: A Guide to Films and Videos. Fourth edition.*
- 42 Meller, Norman  
1999 *Saipan's Camp Susupe.*

## THE CENTER FOR PACIFIC ISLANDS STUDIES

The Center for Pacific Islands Studies at the University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa is both an academic department and a larger home for initiatives that bring together people and resources to promote an understanding of the Pacific Islands and issues of concern to Pacific Islanders. Its innovative instructional program is regional, comparative, and interdisciplinary in nature. With a core and affiliate faculty of almost forty members, the center offers programs of study leading to a Master of Arts degree in Pacific Islands Studies, and a Certificate in Pacific Islands Studies. The university’s Pacific Collection, one of the most comprehensive collections of Pacific materials in the world, attracts a worldwide audience, as do the center’s international conferences, its Web-based resources, and its publications: In addition to the Occasional Papers, the center publishes the Pacific Islands Monograph Series; an award-winning journal, *The Contemporary Pacific*; and a newsletter, *Pacific News from Mānoa*. Working with scholars at institutions in the region and elsewhere, faculty at the center are seeking new ways to encompass a deeper understanding of a region whose boundaries are constantly expanding.

## THE CENTER FOR PACIFIC ISLANDS STUDIES

The Center for Pacific Islands Studies at the University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa is both an academic department and a larger home for initiatives that bring together people and resources to promote an understanding of the Pacific Islands and issues of concern to Pacific Islanders. Its innovative instructional program is regional, comparative, and interdisciplinary in nature. With a core and affiliate faculty of almost forty members, the center offers programs of study leading to a Master of Arts degree in Pacific Islands Studies, and a Certificate in Pacific Islands Studies. The university’s Pacific Collection, one of the most comprehensive collections of Pacific materials in the world, attracts a worldwide audience, as do the center’s international conferences, its Web-based resources, and its publications: In addition to the Occasional Papers, the center publishes the Pacific Islands Monograph Series; an award-winning journal, *The Contemporary Pacific*; and a newsletter, *Pacific News from Mānoa*. Working with scholars at institutions in the region and elsewhere, faculty at the center are seeking new ways to encompass a deeper understanding of a region whose boundaries are constantly expanding.



Indigenous Encounters  
Reflections on Relations between People in the Pacific

Creative Writing, Poetry, Art, and Scholarship by

Lu'ukia Archer, Julia Gray, Yola Gray  
Greg Dvorak, Kali Fermantez, Karin Ingersoll, Terri Janke  
Ma'alia Ka'aihue, U'i Keli'ikuli, Emelihter Kihleng, B. David Kobako  
Monica LaBriola, Sarah Lightner, Brandy Nālani McDougall, Vaimu'a Muliava  
Christopher Robbins, Tanya Wendt Samu, Trisha Kehaulani Watson

Edited by  
Katerina Martina Teaiwa

Center for Pacific Islands Studies Occasional Paper 43